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DR. NICHOLAS STONE



By E. SPENCE DE PUE

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“ ‘Ah, yes, this is it, Tobias. Here is the cause of poor La Rue’s death.’ ”

Frontispiece. See page 38

Dr. Nicholas Stone

BY

E. SPENCE DE PUE
=

Illustrated by Frank X. Chamberlin



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Dr. Nicholas Stone.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Chapter I.	9
Chapter II.	35
Chapter III.	55
Chapter IV.	70
Chapter V.	88
Chapter VI.	102
Chapter VII.	119
Chapter VIII.	133
Chapter IX.	150
Chapter X.	163
Chapter XI.	175
Chapter XII.	189
Chapter XIII.	212
Chapter XIV.	233

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FACING
PAGE

“ ‘Ah, yes, this is it, Tobias. Here is the cause of poor La Rue’s death.’ ”	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
“ ‘Do you remember the Martini case, Mr. Shipley?’ I asked ”		32
“ I had looked upon the distorted, brutal face of a fiend ”		48
“ As we ascended the marble steps, an old gentleman came down ”		64
“ The bare feet from behind turned the corner. Miss Ybarra’s breath came sharp in my ears ”		96
“ There in the dark were two luminous red globes. They came slowly toward me ”		112
“ ‘And it is you, Mr. Forsythe, you, who have imbued your hands in innocent blood!’ ”		120
“ ‘There was many a day when I thought of this old couch,’ he drawled ”		136
“ ‘The retort was at a white heat, and I was about to be thrust in’ ”		160
“ ‘The smoke choked me and got into my eyes, but I hung to the queue’ ”		184
“ ‘His cue rattled to the floor and he reeled backward’ ”		208
“ ‘He died, in fact, so soon as he put that cigar in his mouth’ ”		248

Dr. Nicholas Stone

CHAPTER I

Seldom have I been more contented with my lot than I was on this morning in the early part of 1902. It was the end of my second year as Pacific Coast Manager of the great International Life Insurance Company, and, though I was somewhat young for the responsible position, I felt that I had acquitted myself with honor.

The sun poured in through the big plate-glass window and made a widening golden way across the moss-green carpet; it brought with it not only warmth, but happiness and the promise of prosperous days to come. I like to look back upon the early part of that day; there will never be another like it.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

On either side the path of sunshine were the chairs of Dr. Stone and myself. Dr. Stone's fine, muscular form was a thing upon which the eye might well dwell with satisfaction, particularly my eye, for I was painfully conscious of the fact that I was an undersized, nervous, anaemic little man. It was not Dr. Stone's form alone that one admired; you almost forgot that when the gaze rested upon his face—it was so strong, kind, and human. His honest blue eyes looked at you in such a child-like, trusting way, that you could but wonder whether he could successfully battle with the guile of the world. The firm chin said that he could; the lurking smile that played hide and seek under his blond mustache made you wonder whether or not he would.

Long as I have known the Doctor, dear a friend as he is of mine, I have never quite satisfied myself that I really under-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

stand him to the full depths of his nature. Every time I meet him I am certain of learning something new, of getting a different view of life.

“ Wilkinson,” said he, abruptly breaking a not unpleasant silence, “ has it ever occurred to you that you may be the innocent tool of vice, the unsuspecting accessory of murder? ”

For a moment I could not answer, the question took me so by surprise.

“ N—no,” I stammered, glancing sharply at him. “ Why? What makes you ask such a question? ”

“ Because I believe that you are,” he drawled in his quiet way. “ I’ll prove it if you wish.”

I took another look at his face, wondering whether he was laughing at me; his expression was earnest.

“ You wonder that I should say such a thing; you are startled. Let me make a

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

brief statement, then you will perhaps understand better. Of late years I have devoted a great deal of time to an analysis of the criminal mind, and as a result I have learned some very surprising things. I have come to the conclusion that there is no occupation, industry, or enterprise in which there is not crime."

"But that's no reason why you should accuse me of being a criminal," I interrupted warmly.

"I have come to the further conclusion," he went on, heedless of my interruption, "that in your business there is a greater proportion of crime than in any other, and that murder is by no means infrequent." Crossing one leg over the other, he smiled at me in a satisfied, dispassionate sort of way, as though he had just announced that it would be warm on the morrow, or some other equally unimportant thing. He seemed already to have

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

forgotten the personal application of his announcement.

I stared at him blankly for several minutes. Finally I answered:

“ Of course no sensible man denies that there is crime in the world, Doctor. But you will certainly make an exception in favor of our company.”

“ No. You don’t understand. I mean your company. I mean you, Toby. I mean that you are not shrewd enough, not suspicious enough to outwit criminals,” he said, a tone of insistence in his voice.

“ Crime in our company!” I replied commiseratingly. “ Never! Why, don’t you know that the International is the largest life insurance organization in the world, that it carries over a billion dollars worth of insurance, and that its assets are hundreds of millions of dollars? ”

“ Exactly,” he answered, as though inviting me to continue.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Do you appreciate the fact that its management, down to the smallest detail, is more exacting in its attention to details than any Government; and that it has an unequaled system of checks and counter-checks? And, lastly, do you not know that it has the finest possible secret service department? ”

“ In spite of all these things; in fact, I might say because of them, murder for life insurance is of daily occurrence. Your company, along with the lesser ones, is paying the price of the crime. It’s too bad, Toby. You can’t stop it. You don’t even know that these things are so,” he said patiently.

His manner was so impressive that, for the moment, I was almost convinced. My better judgment saved me. Resolutely shaking off the feeling of oppression that had come upon me, I told him that I could not believe him.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“Toby,” he said—I like to have him call me that—“suppose I should prove you wrong?”

“I would believe then. I can not before, Doctor.”

“Will you let me inspect your books?” I hesitated.

“I think that I know just how a criminal would proceed to defraud an insurance company. If your books show nothing out of the way—why, then I’m wrong, and your company is invulnerable. If there has been fraud, murder, you wouldn’t want to conceal it.”

“But our secret service?” I protested.

“That for your detectives!” He snapped his fingers. “Professional detectives may never even *hope* to follow the shrewdest criminals; they are too materialistic; they don’t understand.”

“Very well, you shall have the books. I’ll cheerfully eat any book that shows

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

crime in this branch of the company," I said.

" The records for this year will do. If I can't find sufficient there to justify my assertions, it would be useless to go further," he replied confidently.

If I permitted a satisfied, incredulous smile to show upon my face, it was not that I doubted the sincerity, the acuteness of Dr. Stone, but because I had such confidence in the International. So soon as the books were given to him, I turned to my desk. Half an hour later, happening to glance over my shoulder, I found him facing me, and the books closed and neatly piled on one corner of the desk.

" Well," I said, " I presume you are convinced now? "

" Yes, Toby, quite convinced. I must thank you for placing such excellent data at my disposal."

I was about to condole with him upon

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

his disappointment but something in his face arrested the words. I looked at him again.

“ Y—you haven’t—? ” I faltered, a sudden conviction eating at my heart.

“ Yes, I have, my friend. My convictions were well founded.”

“ It can’t be! It can’t be! ” I shouted. Starting up, I walked nervously back and forth a few times, then sank limply into my chair. “ Go on,” I gasped hoarsely. “ Tell me the very worst.”

“ If you’re going to take it so hard as that, Toby, let’s dismiss the whole thing,” he said kindly.

“ No, I’m all right now, Doctor. Tell me what you found,” I answered, trying to pull myself together.

“ This company has paid the price of murder several times,” he began. “ Of course I didn’t expect to find in your records a detailed account as to how these

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

crimes were committed. But within the past year you have paid nearly half a million dollars upon two fraudulent claims. There may be others; I followed up only one line of reasoning."

"Ha—half—" I gasped, but I could get no further. I felt the world slipping from me.

"Don't take it so hard, Wilkinson. It's not your fault," he encouragingly assured me.

"Murder! Two murders within this year—in my department," I said hoarsely. Then I laughed, a little hysterically, I fear. "No, no, it can't be! You have simply applied theories to figures. Those books have been gone over dozens of times."

"Very well, let it go at that," he replied soothingly. "If the wrongs are beyond righting it's just as well to let them go. Let us say that it's all theory."

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Ah, the sweetness of his smile, the kindness of that voice. I loved him and respected him for his composure, and the more respect I had for him, the more cordially I detested myself. Instinctively I put out my hand to him and he clasped it tightly, as though I had been a small boy whose feelings he tried to spare.

“No, no!” I exclaimed. “Murder is an awful thing! It won’t do to hide it. If it has been done once it will be done again. I want proof; I must have it.”

“I don’t know but that you are right,” he said, after a long, thoughtful silence. “I’ll point out what I have found. If you want to look further into the matter, why—I’ll help you a little for the satisfaction it will give me to carry my theory to its logical conclusion.

“Your records show that in the early part of this year you paid two hundred and fifty thousand dollars on the life of

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Edward Martini; that he was twenty-six years of age, and that the cause of death is given as suicide," he said, referring to his notes.

"Yes, the claim was investigated by our agents, and found to be flawless," I hastened to explain. "The policy had been in force nearly two years before death. Young Martini committed suicide at an insane asylum."

"Ah! Yes? I also observe that the insurance did not accrue to the relatives of the deceased, but that the money was paid to a—let me see. Yes, to a Mr. Wilson, to whom it had been assigned."

"Yes, yes. Date of assignment is six months previous to death of the insured, by his own hand," I answered, seeing the clearing of one suspicious case. "The assignment was made almost four months before the young man lost his reason, and was made payable to Adolph Wilson, as

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

security for notes given in payment for a mining claim in the Klondyke."

" You know this Mr. Wilson personally, I presume? "

" I can't say that I do. He was not in this country at the time the policy became a claim, and the money was collected through a broker having Mr. Wilson's power of attorney."

" So I had observed," answered Dr. Stone musingly. " You see nothing in this to arouse your suspicions? " he inquired.

I confessed that I did not, and repeated that our agents had made careful inquiries into the details of the death, verifying the statements in the claim.

" Let us go on to the other case then. When I refer to the Martini case again, I shall point out to you four things which are absolute proofs to my mind that the young man was murdered for his insurance money. Five months and four days later

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

you paid a claim of two hundred thousand dollars on the life of Francis La Rue. The cause of death is given as cardiac syncope—in common language, heart-failure—and the claim was paid to G. Berber upon an assignment. The decedent was twenty-nine years of age, and presumably sound of health at the time his life was insured. Can you give me any of the particulars of this case? ”

“ Yes,” I answered eagerly, “ Mr. La Rue’s insurance, as the records have informed you, had been in force but little over a year at the time of his death. There was nothing to point toward criminality.”

“ That’s as you look at it. Please continue,” he said.

“ Mr. La Rue died at his suburban residence. There were four guests with him at the time; all of them were assembled in the billiard-room. Suddenly Mr. La Rue turned very pale and sank to the floor.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Before assistance could be summoned, he was dead. Of course an official examination was made. The heart was found to be filled with blood, but there was no impairment of the valves—a simple failure of the muscle to perform its functions, it appears. I believe that such cases are rare, though," I admitted grudgingly. I had told all I knew about the case.

"And the assignment?" he suggested.

"Quite in the line of ordinary business transactions. Mr. La Rue, as not infrequently occurs, had his policy made payable to his estate, which, so long as he was alive, was, of course, himself. He bought extensively of stocks in the Kern County oil-fields. For a part of these purchases he gave his notes, and to secure these assigned his policy."

"To G. Berber, according to the records," said Dr. Stone. "In this instance, also, the money was collected through a

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

broker armed with the power of attorney. Not the same broker who collected the Martini money, however. It has been nobly done, Toby. I don't wish to disparage your detective agency, but it is hardly to be expected that they would run down cases of this kind. It was a shrewd man who planned these murders."

"Why do you still say 'murder'?" I asked, a little impatiently.

"Yes, of course," he answered, coming out of the reverie in which he seemed to have lost himself. Thrusting one hand into his pocket and resting his chin upon the other, he fixed me with his gaze. "It's not common, I believe, to assign life insurance policies!"

"Oh, yes; it is an every-day occurrence," I answered, quickly.

"Yes, within the family, and not for a consideration. I should have said that it is not a common thing to assign policies

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

as security for commercial paper. To make my deductions clear, I shall explain the theory upon which I worked in going through your books: A shrewd swindler, desirous of obtaining money from a life insurance organization, a man devoid of conscientious scruples, would be apt to resort to methods that would not readily arouse suspicion. However, as there would be some risk, he would endeavor to obtain a sufficient reward to justify him—a human life should not be held too cheap. Therefore I looked up the largest claims; there were five. He would endeavor to make the claim directly payable to himself in the event of the death of the insured. By what other method could he do this than by gaining an assignment? You follow me? ”

“ I do, ” I answered.

“ Now we have only one link missing in the chain. Let us supply that by saying

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

that these purchases for which the policies were pledged were worthless. Of the five large claims paid, I was enabled to eliminate three for the obvious reason that the money was paid directly to the persons named as beneficiaries in the policies; and I took the further precaution of looking up the length of time the insurance had been carried and the causes of death, none of which excited my suspicions. That simplified matters. Now, the man who would plan such a thing would not care to wait longer for his money than was necessary, and we have the fact that neither of these policies was in force till the third premium was paid. We have also the fact that in neither case is the cause of death sufficiently satisfactory from a medical point of view."

"But Martini killed himself," I protested.

"I was coming to that; just a little

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

patience, Toby. A keen, cool, calculating man could not murder his victim in an ordinary way. On the other hand, if there were no suspicious circumstances the inquiry would be purely formal. If the man murdered himself, the company could not say that he had voluntarily entered into a conspiracy to defraud it. Young Martini went mad. Why? Was he driven to it? Was there a plot laid to deprive him of his reason? Was he frightened into taking his own life? ”

“ Wait, wait! ” I cried. Placing my finger on a button, I held it there until a boy came running through the door. “ See if Mr. Shipley is in the office. If he is, please tell him that I wish to see him, ” I said. Then, turning to Dr. Stone, I continued, “ Shipley is the one who had charge of the case; he can probably tell you something about it. Here he comes. ”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Mr. Shipley was a jolly-faced, fat man with a shrewd, twinkling eye.

“ Do you remember the Martini case, Mr. Shipley? ” I asked, after he had seated himself.

“ Yes, sir, ” with an elevation of the eyebrows. “ Anything new in it, sir? ”

“ No, but Dr. Stone is interested in—what do you call them, Doctor? ”

“ In cases of insanity with suicidal tendency, ” Dr. Stone completed.

“ Oh, yes? Well, Doctor, the young fellow killed himself because he was just naturally afraid to live.”

“ Eh! How’s that? ” I exclaimed, sharply.

“ The case itself was all right, so far as its straightness goes, ” said the detective, “ and I didn’t take much interest in the insanity part—out of my line, you know. But they told me, out at the asylum, that there were times when he was perfectly

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

frantic; when he screamed, and swore that he saw horrible things that a man had no right to see and live; and—that's about all I know about it, sir," apologetically to the Doctor.

I excused the man. When he had gone I sat in silence with my head bowed. When I looked up again it seemed as if Dr. Stone's kindly face towered way above me. He sat with his hands clasped across one knee.

"I know just how you feel, Toby," he said gently. "You have had such faith in the perfection of your company that a thing like this comes to you as an awful shock."

"Yes, that is it," I answered wearily. "Your logic overwhelms and convinces me by its very completeness."

"But I've only partly explained one case," he interrupted.

"Yes, but that looks so conclusive," I

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

said, " and I don't know how you were led to these conclusions."

" It is the elaboration of an old theory practically applied," he answered, half-dreamily. " Every man has in him the elements of good and evil. One man is good, honest, upright, simply because he suppresses all of the evil that is in him. The criminal is bad because he crushes his better instincts; and the two classes are separated by as great a space as divides the north from the south. And yet, each class has in it some of the elements of the other. Mind you, I am taking, for illustration, the extremes of the classes. There is a class that must be studied by itself, and to which this broad statement does not apply. Now, why should a man not develop both sides of his nature to their fullest extent? Following this line of reasoning I have persistently developed in myself the criminal mind. I can call

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

it into play just as readily as I can summon my better instincts. It has ceased to be an effort. For the time I think and plan as the criminal would plan. I experience all his excitement, suffer all his fears; I become hard, mercenary, unscrupulous."

"No, not you!" I said, aghast.

"Yes, if you want to know what a man would do under certain conditions, you must put yourself in that man's place, subject yourself to the same stress." He lapsed into a thoughtful silence.

Looking at his face again, on which no sign of evil showed, knowing as I did how human were his natural impulses, I could but wonder. I have seen him stop his cab that he might get out and pick up some maimed dog and carry it home with him.

"Shall we go on?" he asked, breaking in upon my meditation.

"Yes, go on; and if there is money enough in the company to bring the vil-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

lains to justice, I shall see that it is done."

I watched him narrowly as he half-closed his eyes and looked down. It seemed to me that a subtle change crept over his face; that the good look I was accustomed to see there faded away, and that a shrewd expression came in its place, a look of cunning.

"A suburban residence is an ideal place for the commission of a crime such as this murder of young La Rue," he said. "It is probably some distance from where medical aid could be obtained. The young man died in the presence of his friends; and this, let me say, was the very safest method of taking a life. How was he killed? Poisoned, Toby, poisoned. I am as positive as though I had the proofs in my hand. A man in the prime of life does not have his heart fail him without cause; and there was none, for a game of billiards is not a very exciting sport. One of the



“ Do you remember the Martini case, Mr. Shipley ? ” I asked ”

Page 28

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

vegetable alkaloids, some powerful heart depressant. That's all that I can tell you, for I have none of the other facts."

I am ashamed to record the extent of my agitation. I fear that I have made myself out a weak man. But it must be remembered that I had never before found it necessary to study such problems and that they were revolting to me, to say nothing of the fearful shock it was to find that the company for which I had such a great respect had been victimized as easily as a petty tradesman.

"Can't we follow this up, Doctor? If this sort of thing has occurred once, it is liable to occur again, you know. We can't let it—we can't let it! It would be too awful!"

Dr. Stone pondered some time before answering.

"I'd like to follow it up, Toby," he said finally. "If I work out my conclusion to

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

its end I can prove my theory to the world, to its betterment. But I fear that it isn't worth while going to Mr. La Rue's residence; it isn't likely I could learn——”

“I forgot,” I broke in; “the next morning after Mr. La Rue's death, the house was closed. It has not been entered since.”

“So? In that case I have hopes that I may discover something. I will drop in and see you in a day or so.”

With that he left me, after inquiring the address.

CHAPTER II

All the balance of the morning, all the afternoon, I thought of what Dr. Stone had said. I could not keep my mind on my business, and was unnecessarily crabbed and exacting. I supposed that, with the coming of a new day, I should recover my composure; but in this I was grievously disappointed. Try as I would, I could not keep my mind off those two awful murders.

The more I thought of it, the worse it seemed. Now that I no longer had Dr. Stone at my side, acting as a sort of check and counterbalance to my volatile imagination, I went quite to pieces. I began to suspect everything, every one. I fell to scrutinizing every paper for some hidden meaning. Not a new application for insurance came in but I wondered

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

whether it was not the precursor of some desperate, cold-blooded murder. The more I thought and pondered and suspected, the more nervous and irritable I became. If the International had been deceived twice, and with such skill and cunning that our intelligence department had not had its suspicions even aroused, what could we expect in the future?

My lunch nauseated me. The cheap wit and shallow repartee of the club, in which I generally joined so heartily, disturbed me. I hurried back to the office without having satisfied my hunger. Throwing open the door, I hastened blindly to my desk, dropped dejectedly into the chair, and was about to give way to gloomy speculations, when I was startled by a voice which said:

“ Well, Toby, you really should be more sociable.”

I whirled my chair around. There,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

near the door, sat Dr. Stone, smiling at me calmly over the top of a newspaper. For obvious reasons I shall refrain from setting down here the commonplace things said. I was glad to see him.

“ Well? ” I interrogated, at the first opportunity I permitted myself. “ The house —what did you find? ”

“ It was quite too simple, ” with a little laugh. “ At this rate I shall soon have to consider myself eligible for a place with the professional police. ”

“ Why—what—what is it? ” I asked.

“ Simply that, had I applied my theory a little farther, had I given my other nature full play, it would have been unnecessary for me to trouble to go to the house. I could have worked it out here just as well as not. When a man has a theory in which he has confidence, he ought never to go outside that theory except to verify it, not to assist it as it were.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

The problem was elementary.” Pausing for an instant he thrust a thumb and forefinger into his vest pocket and drew forth a little package wrapped in paper. “ Ah, yes, this is it, Tobias. Here is the cause of poor La Rue’s death.”

Reaching for the object, I found myself in possession of — what? An ordinary piece of billiard chalk.

“ You’ve handed me the wrong thing, Doctor!” I exclaimed, turning the chalk over in my fingers.

“ No, that’s it. Piece of billiard chalk. Found it in one of the little iron cups under the edge of the billiard-table,” he said.

“ But—it’s not all so plain to me, you know,” I protested. “ I want to hear how you got into the house; what leads you to think this harmless little object—”

His soft laugh interrupted me. “ Really now, Toby, I shall not tell you how I got

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

into the house," he drawled. "I'm ashamed of it. Nothing had been disturbed since that eventful night. As I stood there by the table I let the criminal side of me get to work. Look at that piece of chalk. Do you notice anything peculiar about it?"

"Almost new," I said, "and has evidently been dropped on the floor, for several little pieces have been knocked off."

"Bitten off, Toby, bitten off. Don't you see the teeth marks? I had even decided that such was the case before I found the chalk. This is the way my theory worked out in that darkened billiard-room: If I were to kill the man with poison, a heart-depressant would— But I had decided it was done that way before I left here the other day, so it was hardly working fair. I really felt as though I were taking advantage of a handicap in the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

game. The only thing for me to decide was the method of administration. First I had to reconstruct my man, to decide upon any little personal peculiarities. An unmistakable photograph of young La Rue assisted me. I saw a fine, manly, impulsive young fellow of a nervous physique. I pictured that man playing billiards. It was clear to me before I had thought two minutes and a half that, as he watched his opponent make a difficult shot, he stood back and bit at his finger-nails; and then, again, that when he had a square of chalk in his hands he would take a nibble at it. Quite too simple, Toby. I merely looked around and found the chalk. This little block," balancing it on one of his fingers, "contains enough of that powerful alkaloid, aconitin, to kill every man and woman working in this office. A fiftieth of a grain is easily a fatal dose."

"Who did it; who did it, though?" I

DR, NICHOLAS STONE

demanded. “ Berber, the man who profited, wasn’t in the State.”

“ Really, I’m not a detective, you know, Tobias. I wasn’t seriously interested in who did it, but merely in how it was done,” he answered in an injured tone.

“ Oh, Doctor,” I groaned, “ what use is all your theory if it’s not practical, if it’s merely abstract? ” Completely discouraged I laid my head on the desk and groaned again.

“ Never mind, old fellow, don’t worry about it. The difficulties you suggest ought to be easy enough to solve.”

Just then there came a knock at the door; my stenographer entered and laid some papers on the desk. Glancing hurriedly over them, I suddenly felt myself go pale as I jerked one paper from the middle of the pile.

“ Here, here! Can this be another murder planned? ” I exclaimed. Everything

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

excited my suspicions now. "Here is an assignment on a policy of a hundred and fifty thousand dollars — the life of a woman, too."

"Let me see it," said the Doctor with more eagerness than I had ever known him to show before. "It would be a big thing to divine the murderer's plan before he had time to put it into execution." His eagerness was only momentary, however, and was suppressed almost as quickly as it had come. "I'll take it now, Toby, if you don't mind," he drawled. But, try as he would, the lazy look would not stay in his eyes as they ran over the paper, and insistent little smiles persisted in creeping from their blond ambush. It was plain to my eyes that he was pleased.

My own emotions were in inverse relation to his own. There was nothing pleasing to me in that paper, for it spoke only of black tragedy and disgrace to my com-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

pany. Give me the hardest business problem to solve; force me to fight against any combination of rivals; let me have the most unruly band of agents and solicitors to subdue, and you will find that Tobias Wilkinson has a will of iron. Let me feel my back against the International's financial wall, and I can fight to the death. But take me outside the legitimate realm of business, as these horrible murders were doing, and I am lost.

“There's a very pretty problem here, Toby. One worthy of my theory, or law, as I shall call it. To beat the murderer at his own game; to forestall him in his plans, to block his steady march toward checkmate; yes, rather worth while, I think. This should be the proving of my theory, even as it will test the edge of my mind.” He drew himself up with an air of conscious strength, his blue eyes flashed defiance and the muscles of his jaws

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

bunched hard. "I'll have to leave you now. Keep me in mind of this, won't you?" he said, handing back the paper and resuming his lazy look.

"You are not going?" I asked beseechingly.

"Yes. There's a fly-casting tourney this afternoon, and I shall make a try for the trophy. Interesting sport, Toby. Did you ever try it?" he asked, with his hand upon the knob.

"You're not going to desert me! to leave this case unsolved, and give the murderer a free hand and plenty of time?" I asked reproachfully.

I was sorry almost as soon as I had said it, for, seating himself again, he explained that for the present there was not a particle of danger. The policy was only a few months old, and the assignment hardly had the ink dry on it. Was it likely that anything would happen for months?

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Was it likely, when policies were not incontestable until they had been in force for a year, that anything would happen before the year had passed? And there yet lacked many months of it.

As I sat and listened to his reasoning explanations, and the drawling intonation of his patient voice, and basked in the glow of his encouraging smile, I felt satisfied and relieved.

He was right, I assured myself after he had gone. It would assuredly arouse suspicion should anything happen to Mrs. Ybarra at this time. Then, again, the policy certainly did not become incontestable until after it had been in force a year. But, although I dismissed this latest problem from my mind easily, I could not get away from the two previous crimes. They thrust themselves upon me with an annoying persistence. Dr. Stone had said he would help me, but I had no right to

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

expect him to devote much time to the subject. I could hardly lay the matter before our secret service department, for, so far as it was concerned, the matter was closed, unless I could present something tangible, and, so far, there was only theory. Why not put into execution my own reconstructive abilities?

Dr. Stone had said "murderer." Was the term precise? Would it not have been more exact to have said "murderers"? Big, daring thoughts came to me. Suppose that I were of the criminal class? It would be easy enough for me to imagine this, for had not Dr. Stone laid it down as a law that each and every one of us had in him the elements of good and evil? If *he* had developed both sides of his nature, why might not I do the same? Then, what would I do if I were a criminal, and held life cheap, and money as the only thing of worth? I would kill.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

A cold chill ran up my spine as I permitted myself this thought. But resolutely I crowded back every good emotion and encouraged a feeling of brutality to come to the fore. I felt myself grow shrewd, daring, cautious. Yes, I would do this murder in the same careful way the others had been done. But would I stop there? No! A hundred thousand times no. I, a man of ability, an organizer, a manager of men, stop there? Was there not room in the criminal world for me to use my abilities? Must I do things according to rule I asked proudly.

A feeling of grandeur stole over me. I felt myself a very Napoleon of crime. I should organize shrewd men; I should form an association, a corporation of criminals. I should direct them and lay the plans. My corporation would carry on the work in every part of the United States.

“Yes, in every part of the world,” I

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

said aloud, as the immense scheme worked out in my brain. Springing from my seat, I began walking about with long, nervous strides. There were other big insurance companies, some almost as big as the International; I should plan against them all. The great murder trust would control the world. It would pile up millions upon millions of dollars.

I felt my heart swell with enthusiastic pride and my eyes glow with the fire of excitement. Was ever scheme more daring than this? Had ever a leader such as I risen? I walked rapidly back and forth, with bowed head and clenched hands.

Without thought of what I was doing, I opened the door that conceals the wash-stand, drew a glass of water, and drained it at two gulps. I was about to put the glass down again, when I caught a sight of my face in the glass above the basin. I stepped back, the tumbler crashed upon



“I had looked upon the distorted, brutal face of a fiend”

Page 49

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

the marble, and I slammed the door upon that face and for a moment stood tremblingly irresolute. I had looked upon the distorted, brutal face of a fiend, and it terrified me. Dr. Stone might indulge himself in all that sort of thing if he cared to, but hereafter no more of it for me. I went on with the routine of the day somehow; but the things I had thought I could not forget.

I have made it an invariable practice, when I turn my back upon the office at four o'clock in the afternoon, not to think of business again until I return the following morning, and when at work to forget everything else. But that day my mind would hark back to Martini, hounded to his death; and to young La Rue, cut off in an instant. With a start I would come back to the murder that was yet to be. In the press of business I did forget for awhile, but when office hours were over

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

the worries came back again. I left the office, vowing that I would fight it out by myself; but when I got as far as the elevator I turned back, went to the telephone and rang up Dr. Stone.

“Hello, Toby! What’s the trouble?”

“Nothing new?” I asked.

“Yes, missed it by six and three-quarter inches; an awful disappointment,” he said in a rueful voice.

“Eh! Missed what?” I inquired.

“Why, the long-distance cast, of course. But I took the trophy for the delicacy cast, though.”

“Oh!” I replied, in a disappointed tone.

“Won’t you come out and see the new one I’m making? It’s a beauty. I know you’ll like it.”

A little later I found myself in the big office building on Sutter Street. His elegantly furnished waiting-room was deserted.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Name, sir? ” said a boy, bobbing up from somewhere. “ Oh, yes, come right in, sir,” he said after a glance at my card, and threw wide a door.

There sat Dr. Stone in his operating-room, coatless, with a slender stick in one hand and a piece of glass in the other. Sticks and shavings and spools of silk were scattered over the operating-table and on the floor.

“ Making my own rod this time,” he said briskly. “ Got to do something to keep myself occupied, you know. Sit down.”

“ Surprised to find me doing such things, aren’t you? ” he asked.

“ I shouldn’t think you’d have time,” I answered.

“ Time? ” he laughed, with a little shrug of the shoulders. “ Time to burn. Why, Toby, there isn’t a patient comes to bother me half a dozen times a month. That’s

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

the worst of having such a lot of money, you see," he complained.

Then he explained his position: Not being dependent on his practice for a living, he did not encourage patients to come to him, as so many young physicians had to make a livelihood out of their practice. For him, it was sufficient to *know* medicine, and if he could build up a decent indigent practice, as he called it, he should be satisfied.

" I'd like to have one of the dispensary clinics, though. I might be able to help some of the poor fellows who can't pay. I could be practising medicine then, and not injuring the fellows who are struggling along," he ended.

Could you help loving such a man as that? I couldn't.

" Come, Toby, you're in trouble," he said, gathering up his rods. " Tell me all about it."

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

I suppose I bored him with all my fancies and worries, but, if so, he did not show it.

“Bless your soul, my boy, you worry too much,” he said, with his sympathetic smile. “But, just to please you, we’ll reason on it a bit; we’ll apply the infallible law.

“Now, Toby, in the murdering of a woman, we have a somewhat different problem from the murder of a man. The thing is to forestall and outwit the criminal. Let me see how I should do it.”

Watching his face narrowly, I saw the same subtle change take place in it that I had noted the day before. The trustfulness faded from the blue eyes. A sneer gave place to the smile that always hovered about the lips. All the soft lines faded away, one by one. The usually languid fingers beat an inaudible tattoo on the side of the table, then, drawing up his hand, he covered half his face; and I sat and watched and waited.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Finally—sitting up with a start—“ It’s harder than I had thought it would be, Toby,” he said, “ there are so many things to choose from. The woman is a widow, fifty years of age. It might be possible to work upon the superstitions, drive her to some desperate act. I don’t like that, though, because it is too commonplace.”

One after another he enumerated the plans that might be tried. He threw out poison because it had been used before. In the end he decided that the most desirable method would be an auto-inoculation of tetanus, “ for,” he said, “ should lockjaw set in, subsequent to a clear history of some slight wound, there would be nothing suspicious about it.”

It was by arguments such as these, and positive assertions of the remoteness of the date of the impending trouble, that he sought to ease my mind. When I left him my spirits were almost as light as his own.

CHAPTER III

The next morning as I sat with a newspaper propped up before me enjoying my coffee and roll I was almost happy. I skipped lightly from one news item to another; took a look at the foreign news and a dip at the local, but could find nothing that long held my attention. Then I did something that I cannot recall having ever done before—ran my eye down the column of death notices.

The following caught my attention: “Died, Mrs. Jose Ybarra, 53 years of age.”

I read it through mechanically. I read it again, with starting eyes. I read it a third time, fatuously endeavoring to give the words another meaning. As the significance of the item forced itself upon me I felt my chin sag heavily, and a great faintness came upon me.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Then came the reaction. The startled waiter must have thought that I was the victim of a sudden attack of mania, for, with a violent exclamation, I overturned my cup of coffee, pushed my chair from the table, and rushed from the building, carrying the paper in my hand.

The fresh air of the street and the jibe of a newsboy brought me partly to my senses. I stopped, held up the paper and stared at it again. The item was still there; I had not read it wrong.

How I got to the office I do not know, I could not say whether I ran or walked. "Mrs. Ybarra dead! Mrs. Ybarra dead!" I kept saying to myself, over and over, in a dazed way. I was too deeply shocked to appreciate my mental condition.

When I reached my desk I jerked the telephone receiver off the hook and called for Dr. Stone's number. When he answered, I said some meaningless, inco-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

herent words, then hung up the 'phone again, and threw myself back in the chair and waited.

Possibly it was not over half an hour before he came. It may not have been as long, but it seemed an interminable time. When he entered his face was anxious, troubled.

"What is the matter, Toby?" he said. "I could not make anything out of what you said over the 'phone."

I handed him the paper, pointing to the item.

"Mrs. Ybarra dead!" he said, a note of surprise in his voice. "This is too bad, Toby; this is something unexpected." He stood holding the paper in his hand, a look of perplexity on his face.

"Too bad! Too bad!" I stormed. "Is that all you have to say? Here a woman is murdered. We both had reason to expect that she would be murdered. We

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

might have prevented it, and all you have to say is that it is 'too bad!'"

"What would you have me say?" he asked, a dangerous hardness in his cold tone, a hardness that I did not at the moment note.

"Say! I wouldn't have you say anything. I'd have you do something. I'd have had you do something before it had come to this. Instead, you lulled me into a false security by your sophistry; you tied my hands with your plausible—" I broke off short, for his fingers were biting into my shoulder.

"Don't you think you'd better control yourself a bit, Wilkinson?" he asked, sternly. "Suppose you think awhile before you say things you may regret. No, don't apologize. I know how you feel." Then he turned from me and walked over to the window.

Feeling that I had been justly rebuked,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

I shrank in my chair and waited for him to speak again.

“Toby,” his voice was sharp, “send for your man Shipley. Tell him to go to the Ybarra residence and learn the cause of death.”

When the detective had gone, I sank back again. I don’t know how long I remained in one position—it must have been for some time. Not a word did Dr. Stone say until after the boy had entered and announced Mr. Shipley’s return. Then he took me lightly by the shoulders and gave my chair a twirl, so that I sat facing him.

“Now, Toby,” he drawled, “I’ve given you time enough to recover from your shock. If you want me to help you, you’ll have to pull yourself together; otherwise I’ll throw the whole thing over. Now get Mr. Shipley in.”

“There’s nothing wrong in this case, sir,” said Mr. Shipley, with an expansion

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

of his habitual smile. "Mrs. Ybarra died of apoplexy at about eleven o'clock last night. Her daughter was with her at the time."

That was the gist of the detective's report, though he said a great deal more.

"I think you look a trifle more fit now," smiled Dr. Stone, when we were alone again. "You're not responsible for *all* the trouble in the world. Apoplexy," musingly, "I hadn't thought of that."

"But some one is responsible for this. We—we thought that she was safe for the present," I ventured timidly.

"Suppose she really did die of apoplexy?" was his answer. "People sometimes do, you know," with a winning smile. "Look the thing square in the eyes, Toby. I don't like to see you overcome this way, it's not becoming."

"It's the last time," I answered. "I'll never let myself go again." And I never

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

did. "Then you believe it's another?" I asked.

"There, you are more like yourself now. There is only one way to determine whether or not it is murder. When I assured you that Mrs. Ybarra was in no danger, I believed it. I still hold that my reasoning was sound. It is inconceivable that any sane criminal would make way with his victim less than two days after having perfected the arrangements that would assure him the money. My law cannot be wrong; no one is to be blamed. I should be the first to accuse myself of carelessness. We must learn upon what security the assignment was made. I must see the daughter. Will you go with me, or shall I go alone?" The drawl was gone from his voice.

"I'll go," I answered eagerly. "Action may do me good; besides, we may pick up some clue."

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ That’s right, pick up all the clues you want, but save them for Mr. Shipley; I shouldn’t know what to do with such things if I had them.” Linking his arm in mine, he led the way to the street.

“ Rincon Hill,” I called to the driver of the cab, and in a moment we were whirling away.

Rincon Hill is an old-fashioned section of the city from which the glory has long since departed. The owners of the few ancient mansions with stubborn yet helpless pride await the time when they will be crowded off their little eminence by the lusty work-a-day folk who have overrun the plain below.

The house in front of which we alighted had once been a pretentious dwelling. It was evident, however, that its occupants had fallen upon evil days; everything connected with the place proclaimed it.

As we ascended the marble steps, an old



“As we ascended the marble steps, an old gentleman came down”

Page 62

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

gentleman came down. He was a man far past middle age, with white side-whiskers and an exceedingly kind and benignant expression of countenance.

Dr. Stone presented his card to the maid who came in answer to our ring, and we were conducted to a dreary-looking library.

“ You stay here, Toby; I’ll be back before long. You might amuse yourself looking for clues.” The latter was added in a low tone.

After I had sat there during half an hour, his last lightly uttered words came to me. Clues are material things; if I could find one it might be worth while. Not knowing what I was looking for, nor where to look for it, I was naturally at a disadvantage. I began wandering idly about the room. The books were few; the furniture and hangings rich, but of a style in vogue many years ago. I drifted from gilt-framed pictures to a cabinet of curios,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

and from this to the window and back to the curio-case again. Then I consulted my watch and looked about once more. A little painting at the far end of the room attracted my attention. It was a rather good portrait done in oil; as I stepped close to it to obtain a better view, I was almost thrown from my balance by some small object under foot.

“Ah! A possible clue,” I said to myself facetiously. Stooping, I picked up a small cork and turned it over in my hand. It was a new cork, and on either side of it was a little gutter-like cut. My scrutiny was interrupted by the sound of approaching steps, however, and I thrust it into my pocket.

It was Dr. Stone. He did not enter the room, but stood in the doorway and beckoned me to follow him.

Not a word could I induce him to speak all the way back to the office, and on his

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

face was a set expression that I had never seen there before.

After we had seated ourselves in my office, he drew a bunch of papers from his pocket. "We shall very shortly decide what we have to deal with," he said. "By the eternal heavens, Toby, it is well for your peace of mind that you did not see what I have seen to-day. I looked into a woman's eyes and saw the tragedy of a soul." His voice was solemn.

"When I left you, I went upstairs and introduced myself to the nurse. What I had come to find was the least of my difficulty, for very shortly I was in possession of these papers. Then it was that the nurse drew me one side and suggested that before I go I had better see the daughter. She led me to the room where the girl was.

"You know the Castilian type, Toby? She represents it at its best; she is not full

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Castilian though. The moment I crossed the threshold of that room I felt I was in a different atmosphere. The air seemed to tremble with rebellion; the young woman looked at me with a challenge in her face, questioning my right to be there. It wasn't the time, it wasn't the place for such emotions; but, try as I would not to recognize the feeling, Toby, I loved that woman—I felt my heart go out to her. Perhaps it was because I felt this that I was so deeply cut by the tragedy I saw in her eyes.

“I applied the law which you have heard me explain before. I put myself in that girl's place. I endowed myself with her attributes, placed myself in her station in life, and with greater success than I have ever achieved in following a criminal mind. What I saw was grief, despair, self-murder! I knew that unless I did something to change the current of her

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

thoughts, and did it at once, she would carry out her evident resolution.

“ I sat down by her side. I took her hand in mine. At first she cast a glance at me that pierced through me. I did not pause. I talked to her as if she had been my own sister.”

I could imagine how he had done it, and how she had given way before that magnetically persuasive voice.

“ When I left her she was in tears. I’d rather see tears any time, Toby, than the look I had seen before.”

For the next half hour or so we were very busy. Borrowing my stenographer, Dr. Stone dictated one letter and telegram after another. First, however, he telephoned to the office of the Shasta County Mining and Development Company—that was the name on the shares of stock. The vice-president, who was also the assignee in the policy, was not in the city and had

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

not been for a week. It was expected that he would return that afternoon.

This, Dr. Stone explained, was what he wanted to know. He also stated that he believed the different assignees in the Martini, the La Rue, and the Ybarra cases were one and the same.

About two o'clock in the afternoon, having received several telegrams, he turned to me with something like his old smile and said he had proof that the shares of stock were not worth the paper they were written on.

"Then the thing to do is to prove the murder and have this man taken into custody!" I exclaimed.

"I was certain I could rely upon you to say that," he answered, throwing me an encouraging smile. "Unfortunately we can't do things in that beautifully direct way. Shares of stock are worth whatever you can get for them. And, although I

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

know exactly the method of Mrs. Ybarra's death, can I prove that this man Garthwait killed her?"

"How can you get the proof that he did it, then?" I asked anxiously.

"He didn't do it, Toby. The answers to my telegrams show that he was out of town every day of this week."

"Who did do it?"

"An agent," he replied. "This man is the principal, working under different aliases. We have uncovered him, and I think will be able to show that he is personating several men. He's too shrewd to connect himself with the tragedies themselves—even safe tragedies, as they are."

"But are you certain that this was murder? Mrs. Ybarra's doctor says she died of apoplexy."

"Yes, Toby, but he didn't know that it was an artificial apoplexy."

CHAPTER IV

If, for a moment, I had hoped to witness another exhibition of Dr. Stone's fine reconstructive powers, I was doomed to temporary disappointment.

“Wait, Toby,” he said, “have patience. This evening I will give you the proof of my assertions simultaneously with the theories themselves.”

Further than this he would say nothing. His talk turned to the pleasures of fly-casting and angling. Once he went out and left me. When office-hours were over he insisted that I should go to his office, and admire the rod he was making, test the little pieces of bamboo, note the precision with which the strips were joined, try the glue that held them, the silk with which they were wrapped, and observe a

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

thousand technical details of rod-making that were as Greek to me.

When dinner time came we must have the best and the most elaborate meal that the "Poodle Dog" afforded. If there was purpose in all this I could not divine it. When we had finished dallying with the dessert and were lingering over the coffee and cigarettes, he drew out his watch.

"It's time now," he said. "Come, we will go to the coroner's office."

We had not far to go. After entering the building he left me standing in the hall during a few minutes.

"I have arranged that we shall have the autopsy room to ourselves," he announced. "The inquest is over; the verdict has been announced."

"And it was—"

"Apoplexy, of course, my dear Wilkinson. It could be nothing else. Now," he continued, as he thrust a key into the lock,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“I’m going to take you in here—it’s the autopsy room, you understand. If you think it will be too disagreeable for you, say so now.”

“I’ll go,” I answered firmly. “I am going to see it through.”

I felt a little tremulous about the mouth when actually in the room, and looked wistfully toward the window—a little fresh air would have made the place more bearable I thought.

“Bravo! you stand it like a veteran,” Stone said. “Now sit down!” indicating a high stool. “I want to prove to you that my theory is absolutely correct; that without so much as having seen Mrs. Ybarra in life, or having made an examination of her brain after death, I can explain the precise method of her murder.

“Apoplexy, you understand,” he continued, “is a hemorrhage from a blood-vessel in the brain. It is generally the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

result of a diseased condition of the arteries. The blood, having escaped into the tissue of the brain, exerts a pressure upon some of the centers, and we have what is called paralysis; if the pressure is upon one of the vital centers, one controlling the heart or respiration, death ensues. At first thought it would seem impossible to produce such a condition artificially — to wound a blood-vessel of the brain without leaving evidence to that effect. Nothing is easier. I can tell you now that some long steel instrument has been thrust into this woman's brain; that she died at the hands of an assassin."

"This is awful, Doctor!" I exclaimed in horror.

"Yes, I suppose it is to you, Toby. It would be to me, too, if I cared to let my mind dwell upon that part of the problem. What we have to consider is this: How would the murderer enter the brain?"

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ The skull presents several points of entrance. The bone over the temple is no thicker than your finger-nail. A hat-pin, for instance, would puncture it without difficulty; but there would be left just the tiniest wound, and that might be discovered upon close inspection; we can dismiss that idea.”

“ But the woman’s daughter was with her at the time she died,” I interrupted.

“ Yes, to be sure. All the better for the murderer. This wound might have been inflicted anywhere between twenty-four and forty-eight hours previous to death. If the bleeding were slow, there would be no symptoms until sufficient blood had accumulated to cause pressure. To go on—the drum of the ear might be pierced, but then there would be subsequent pain that might cause investigation before the purpose was accomplished. That source of entrance could be utilized only if it were

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

desirable to cause death at once by a large hemorrhage. Then, again, the brain might be reached by a curved instrument passed up through the roof of the mouth back of the hard-palate. We can dismiss this without a moment's consideration because of its difficulty and the very high degree of technical skill required. We have only one entrance left—the eye."

"Not puncture the eye?" I whispered, sickened at the thought.

"No, of course not. There is a little cul-de-sac, or pouch, above the eye. A hatpin thrust in there, carried above the eye, would pierce the thin bone of the supra-orbital plate, upon which rests the brain, and—that is the way it was done. Yes, that is the way it was done, Toby," he repeated. "I presume we might as well verify it; though, so far as I am concerned, it is not necessary."

I preferred to turn my head while he

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

busied himself about the table; but he would have me observe what he was doing.

“ This is what is called the frontal lobe. See, the surgeon has cut into it in a number of directions. At the bottom of this cut is a little black mass of blood—a clot. Look closely, Toby, it might be well for you to remember this.”

He placed his finger on the black spot. “ If you will look here, you will see the very small hole in the roof of the orbit.” With unerring precision he pointed it out with his probe. I had to look several times before I could discern any hole.

“ Now we are through,” he said.

While he went to the washstand, I hurried over to the window, opened it a trifle and sniffed hungrily at the fog-laden air. Happening to thrust a hand into my pocket, I was suddenly reminded of the cork.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ What do you make of this? ” I asked, holding it out to him.

“ Oh! ” he answered, with a glance at it. “ Why, that really is a clue. It’s the stopper from a chloroform bottle. I am glad you did not show it to me before; it would have made my solution so much less interesting. Come! ”

I enjoyed that walk through the muggy air. We proceeded almost in silence, each of us busy with his own thoughts. When we were a little way from the apartment house in which Dr. Stone lived, I noticed a cab at the curb. I was just about to bid him good-night and go, when the driver approached.

“ Is this Dr. Stone? ” he said.

“ Yes. ”

“ I was to give you this. ” The man fumbled in his pocket, and presently drew forth a note.

“ Well! ” exclaimed the Doctor, reading

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

the note at a glance. "I'll see you in the morning, Toby."

He handed me the paper. This is what I read:

"My Dear Dr. Stone: You will confer a lasting obligation on me, if, upon the receipt of this, you will call. The driver is instructed to bring you.

"Juanita Ybarra."

By the time I finished reading the note he had stepped into the cab, the door had slammed, and the horses were moving away. I do not think that I can describe myself as a person of impulses, but I felt suddenly impelled to ask Dr. Stone to let me go with him. I called, but the driver gave no heed. Thoughts and premonitions crowded upon me thick and fast. I had a sudden positive conviction that something was wrong, and, foolishly perhaps,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

I ran after the cab. At the corner it turned, and still I ran. At the second corner it turned again. Panting and gasping, with a sharp pain stabbing at my side and, in fact, quite exhausted, I finally stopped.

Was I acting the part of a fool? I asked myself. But I could not rid myself of the haunting fear. I walked for hours in the hope that I might get a glimpse of that cab, and yet I should not have known it had I seen it, for there was nothing peculiar about its appearance. I was so positive that the cab had not gone to Rincon Hill that I did not once think of going there. At length I went home.

I got little sleep. By eight o'clock the next morning I was ringing up Dr. Stone's rooms. He was not there. Neither was he at his office. My fear became a dread conviction. There was no doubt in my mind that the note had been a ruse, that

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

in some unexplainable manner the murderer had obtained a hint of what we knew, and had taken this method of putting his most dangerous enemy out of the way.

What should I do? To inform the police did not seem to me wise. I should be laughed at. I could use our own secret service department, though I could not help recalling Dr. Stone's good-natured contempt for my detectives.

How much should I let them know? There would be nothing gained by dragging the name of Miss Ybarra into the affair. In the end I consulted Mr. Shipley. I related to him as many of my fears as I thought advisable, and he left me with the assurance that everything possible would be done; that in all probability we would see the Doctor before night. But we did not. The hours dragged as no hours ever have before or since.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

When the second day came round I was ill with worry and suspense, and decided to call upon Miss Ybarra. This was a task of such delicacy that I could not think of deputizing it to any one.

When I found myself in the house on Rincon Hill, I felt at a loss as to what to say. I went over and over the different excuses I could give for calling at this time. I was shown into the library.

A young woman came forward to greet me. Castilian, I remembered, Dr. Stone had called her. Before she spoke I had time for a glance at the perfectly rounded form and the dark, oval face, caught a fleeting impressionistic glimpse of the brown-black hair, the low, square brow, the brown eyes half concealed by a fringe of long lashes, and a flash of teeth through the full, half-parted lips.

“Mr. Wilkinson?” she said, glancing at my card. Then she turned and I saw

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

that there was some one else in the room, the genial, kindly-faced old gentleman whom we had met on the steps on the occasion of that other visit. "Mr. Forsythe," she said, presenting him. Then she seemed to wait for me to state the reason for my call.

Seeing that I hesitated, "Mr. Forsythe is an intimate friend, Mr. Wilkinson," she said insinuatingly.

"Yes, a very dear friend," said the old gentleman, in a tone of paternal solicitude.

I was embarrassed. I stammered out a few words to the effect that the business was of an exceedingly private nature, and Mr. Forsythe rose to go. I thought it strange that he should dart me a sharp glance over Miss Ybarra's shoulder as he passed through the door.

"And now?" she said, when she returned.

I slowly took a bunch of papers from

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

my pocket and consumed as much time as possible in finding the note. Yes, the direct method would be the best, I thought.

“Is this your writing, Miss Ybarra?” I asked, handing her the paper.

The little arching of her brows told me that it was not, even before she had time to inspect the paper.

“Where did you get this?” she demanded. “I never wrote such a note in my life. How is it that it has my name signed to it? It is infamous, sir. What does it mean?” Her voice was low, vibrant with suppressed emotion.

“I thought that you had not written it,” I answered, putting out my hand for the paper. “I merely wanted to be certain.”

I suppose it was as bungling and undiplomatic a thing as I could have said.

With a fine sarcasm she turned upon me, questioned me, cross-questioned me, and,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

in a few moments I had related to her the manner of Dr. Stone's disappearance.

“ You are keeping something back, Mr. Wilkinson. You have not told me all. Why should any one care to injure your friend? Most of all, why should my name be used to lure him into trouble? ” A little flame of color leaped into her cheeks as she mentioned herself.

Between her insistence and my indecision, it was not long before I was telling to her the awful story of her mother's death, from the very beginning. There was no way out of it, I could not have lied to her to save my life. She leaned forward, her hands clasped across one knee, listening closely to all that I said. Once or twice she drew her breath sharply, not once did she interrupt. When I had finished, her face was hard and accusing.

“ Why have not you told me this before? Why haven't I known this dreadful

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

thing from the time it happened?" she demanded. "Why was I not informed before the tragedy occurred? I might have done something to avert it!" she flashed at me, bending still farther toward me with a baleful gleam in her eyes.

She looked like a fury. For an instant there was murder in her eyes. For an instant only; then she choked with a great, convulsive sob.

"No, forgive me," she said. "I did wrong to reproach you. You both did the best you could. You could not have foreseen. It was something that you did not expect. It was only a theory that your friend had, after all, and it would not have done to alarm a household.

"God, it is awful!" she said. "At first —when I first lost my mother, it almost drove me mad. I was on the point of a desperate deed, until—well—until that big-souled man came, and talked to me. And

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

now, for my sake he is—” A gesture conveyed her fear.

Rising, she walked the length of the library. When she came back she stood over me.

“ Mr. Wilkinson,” she said, in a low, deep voice, “ I am a woman; I cannot forget that. But there is in me so much of the primitive creature that my soul cries out for vengeance. My mother, gentle soul, took out this policy against my wishes; she never could accustom— But never mind that. She was murdered! Do you think that I can sit idly in the house, like any ordinary woman, and know that *they* walk in freedom! That, even at this moment, they may be torturing the man who pressed them too closely? Must I stand upon convention?

“ What to do? What to do, Mr. Wilkinson? ”

Despite her energy, her vibrant voice,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

there was a fine show of self-control; a reserve that seemed to hold itself in check and wait upon an emergency.

“If I only knew what to do, I should do it, Miss Ybarra,” I said mildly.

“And do you know — your friend has not said who he thought was responsible for this?” she asked.

“Mr. Garthwait — ” I ventured.

“Yes, he in good time. He can’t get away.” There was a cruel certainty in her tone. “But first the man who did the deed itself. Who was he?” An abrupt change came over her; she became calm, ominously calm.

“Mr. Wilkinson,” she said, “I have permitted myself to become excited. I need to think. I want to go over the events as they have happened. I am not in a proper frame of mind to do it now.”

I promised to call upon her the following day.

CHAPTER V

How shall I number days, how compute time? Figures upon a dial are inadequate, and the rising and setting of the sun had ceased to have a meaning. I pushed Shipley frantically, spurring him to use his every effort to find Dr. Stone, entreating him to work every man under his command to the limit. I ate, I slept, I sat at my desk. Each day I hoped, each night I abandoned hope. I ceased to doubt that the worst had happened.

Upon the day succeeding my first call upon Miss Ybarra I called again, and again the next day. Not that I expected to learn anything through these calls; but she was anxious to learn whether I had any news, and whether there was any clue to work from. She was always planning, planning, eating her heart out at the thought of our

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

helplessness and inactivity — and then, somehow, I liked to call.

Latterly I had left word at the office where I might be found at any moment, for I was always hoping, hoping that some word might come. Thus it was that five awful days passed. Days spent in such suspense that, even now, despite the length of time that has intervened, I cannot recall without a feeling of depression.

On the fifth day, at about half after three, I was in consultation with Miss Ybarra. We had not more than touched upon the mystery that was ever the subject of our conversation when there came a ring at the bell. Miss Ybarra answered it herself.

“ Mr. Wilkinson,” she said when she returned, “ there is a Chinaman at the door; he has a letter addressed to you, and will give it only into your hands. Do you think—” significantly. “ Had I not better have him come in? ”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

There was a shuffling, sliding sound of clogs in the hall, the curtain parted, and there stood before us the sweetest-faced, most guileless-appearing Chinese boy I have ever seen. He bowed and smiled like a terra-cotta automaton. His face was innocent through an absolute lack of expression, and he was immaculately clean.

“ Wilke—Wilke—son, you? ” he asked, with a shrewd glance from the tail of his eye.

“ You talk English? ” I demanded, with some suspicion.

“ Lil bit,” he answered, favoring me with an engaging smile and a doleful shake of the head. “ You him? ” He dove into his blouse and brought forth an envelope addressed in the handwriting of my stenographer.

“ Yes, I am he—that is I, ” I answered, reaching for the envelope.

He drew it quickly back, however; then,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

thrusting his finger-nail under the flap, ripped open the envelope, took from it two pieces of paper and handed me one; the other he thrust into his blouse again. Miss Ybarra nodded me to read it, and I ran my eye over the paper. It was simply a note stating that the bearer had come to the office a few minutes after my departure; that he had some message for me, and that, as he would not leave it, the writer had directed him to come to the address I had left. I handed the note to Miss Ybarra.

“ Well, well, give it to me! ” I exclaimed impatiently, my heart beating hard with the hope that it was some word from Stone.

“ Ketchum money first, ” he said naïvely, extending his hand.

I dropped a gold piece into the open hand.

“ No, ” he said decidedly, shaking his head. “ Ketchum him— ” He completed

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

his meaning by pointing successively to the ten fingers of his hands.

“ Oh! A hundred dollars? ” I questioned.

He nodded.

Extortionate as the sum was for the slight service of delivering a note, I had no thought of disputing it. Not having so much money with me, I drew out my check-book and began to write. A hand laid across the book showed me that a check would not do, a vigorous shaking of the head confirmed it. Miss Ybarra came to my relief and insisted upon loaning me the money.

The piece of yellow paper that the Chinaman placed in my hands was folded in a peculiar manner that had no significance to me. The address was in writing that had evidently been done with a Chinese brush. Before reading it, my eye sought the signature.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Stone! ” I cried. “ Some message from Stone! He’s alive! ”

Miss Ybarra’s head was very close to mine as we read the note together. This is it:

“ Alive. Befriended by a Chinaman. Come to me. Trust this man. Can’t write more.

“ Stone.”

“ Where is he? Is he ill? Tell me about him.” I eagerly questioned the messenger.

“ No sabee. You come? ” he said, rising.

“ Of course I will come,” I cried impulsively.

“ And so will I,” came a voice at my ear, as a small, firm hand was placed on my arm.

For the moment I had forgotten. I turned to Miss Ybarra in surprise, and her eyes met mine determinedly.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ It is my duty, Mr. Wilkinson,” she said firmly.

“ But I do not know where he is going to take me, Miss Ybarra,” I answered. “ It may be to some place where it is not safe for you to go. It may be dangerous.”

“ Not safe with you, Mr. Wilkinson? ” she asked, an incredulous smile on her lips.

Seeing that I hesitated, she continued: “ Never mind conventionalities. I am going.”

She was out of the room before I could remonstrate.

“ She go? ” I said to the Chinaman.

For answer he raised his shoulders.

Miss Ybarra returned in a tightly-fitting tailor-made. If I ran an approving eye over that well-groomed, perfect outline, it was only because I am a man, and I had need to be much less had I failed of appreciation, even at such a time as that.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

On the front steps we met the genial Mr. Forsythe. When he learned that we were going out, he gave Miss Ybarra's hand a paternal pat and said that he would call another time.

I do not know why we should have had to walk all the way. Clear across the city we followed the Chinaman. When we entered the Chinese quarter, Miss Ybarra drew a little closer to me. The garish bazaars were left behind and the streets became narrower and dirtier. I felt that I should be glad when we were out of this world of dreadful odors and scurrying coolies. In and out, 'round and about, we wound and twisted and turned till I had no idea where we were.

"You stay me close," our guide said, keeping near us now.

Finally we entered a narrow blind-alley. Half-way down it our leader halted, gave a swift glance up and down the street,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

said, “ Quick! ” and dived down half a dozen rotting steps and threw open a basement door. I confess that I hesitated; had I been alone I should have followed immediately, but the thought of taking Miss Ybarra— Before I could give voice to my irresolution she was at the bottom of the steps and I at her side.

“ You come.” The Chinaman beckoned us to follow him.

After all, the place in which we found ourselves was not one to inspire distrust. A long, narrow hall stretched before us. On either side, at short intervals were doors. Some of the doors were open, others shut, and everywhere was the odor of opium and punk. Half-way down a side-hall another Chinamen met our guide and stopped him, and they talked together.

I did not like the appearance of the new Chinaman, and drew Miss Ybarra’s arm close within my own. She was as cool and



"The bare feet from behind turned the corner. Miss Ybarra's breath came sharp in my ears"

Page 99

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

fearless as though we were in the corridor of a hotel.

“Come! I want to see my friend,” I exclaimed, irritated at the delay.

The Chinaman shot me a glance full of resentment, and silently led the way again. “Catchum here,” he said, as we turned down another hall. “Muchee hide.”

This continual winding about was beginning to get on my nerves. What if everything was not all right? I cast a glance at Miss Ybarra and encountered her glance.

“Here,” said our guide, halting before a curtained doorway.

At last! Dear old Stone was at hand. I was about to project myself impulsively through the opening, when Miss Ybarra’s grasp tightened on my arm. I turned to see why she held me.

The three of us stood almost in a row before the door. The Chinaman’s eyes

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

were on us with a curiously intent stare that I could not understand.

“ I wanted to say—” Miss Ybarra began, drawing me back a little so that our positions were altered. Then, while I was waiting for her to complete her sentence, and before I could grasp her meaning, she threw herself violently forward, her hands striking the Chinaman in the back and throwing him off his balance. The man stumbled, tried to recover himself, then reeled through the door.

No sooner had his head and shoulders passed the opening of the curtains than there was a dull, crunching sound, and he sank upon his knees, then fell forward, half in and half out the door. There was a startled cry from within and—I saw what I had escaped.

There was no need for words. Clasping hands we ran down the hall, in the opposite direction from which we had come.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

At the first corner we turned. I heard a patter of bare feet behind us, and saw Miss Ybarra stoop and gather an armful of skirt, still keeping closely at my side, running as silently as myself.

“ Ahead! ” she screamed.

I saw it at the same time. A burly, half-dressed coolie blocked the way. In his hand there was a gleam of steel—a cleaver. The bare feet from behind turned the corner. Miss Ybarra’s breath came sharp in my ears. Now we were opposite the open door of a tiny room. Just inside I saw a pole, such as Chinamen carry baskets on. Releasing the hand of the girl, I darted within.

I don’t know how it was done—perhaps Miss Ybarra does—but that hardwood pole swung forward and the road was clear, it swung backward and we had no pursuer, and I had a cleaver. Then, with my left arm I swept the girl close to me and hur-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

ried on. Her breath burned the side of my face, I felt her heart throb under my hand, but she ran lightly and did not drag.

A window gave us exit from the building to a vacant lot, and that to a narrow alley. Then I remembered that our danger was over; remembered also that I held Miss Ybarra about the waist with my left arm and had a murderous cleaver in my right hand, and became embarrassed.

“ It was noble, Mr. Wilkinson, noble! ”

Dear girl, when I looked into her frank, courageous eyes, I forgot conventionalities, and almost longed for an excuse to hold her close again.

She would not let me throw away the cleaver, but made me conceal it under my coat.

“ Do you know what we have escaped? ” I asked, when we were out of the quarter and safe in a cab.

Then it was she showed her first weak-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

ness, and quite to my surprise buried her head in the cushion with a great sob.

“ It was death for you and slavery for me,” she said when she recovered. “ Oh, if we only had Dr. Stone to help us; he would make them pay for this.”

CHAPTER VI

The more thought I gave to our adventure the more did it impress me with its mystery, with its horror. I could not recognize in myself the easy-going Tobias Wilkinson of a week ago. I felt as though it were all some midnight fantasy, or, when compelled to acknowledge that it was real, it seemed to me that the world had abruptly changed, and that I was an actor in some vivid melodrama, and that all that was lacking was the paint and tinsel of the stage.

My heretofore humdrum, methodical life had now become a romance. My sleep was troubled with such problems as only the Sphynx could have propounded to her victims before devouring them. Through all the weary hours of the night I was either

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

pursued by malignant fiends or racking my brain in the outwitting of villainy.

The morning found me heavy-eyed, nervous, alert, suspicious and oppressed. The clerks eyed me suspiciously as I passed through the outer offices. I saw knowing looks and suggestive winks exchanged.

On the leaf of my desk was accumulated and neglected work. One of the first things to catch my eye were the proofs of death in the case of Mrs. Ybarra and demand for payment of the claim. It was the last insult and injury that I could stand, this brazen demand for blood-money, and in a righteous rage I jabbed at one of the electric buttons.

“Yes, sir,” said the red-headed office-boy, entering with a suppressed grin on his face.

I turned with the intention of emptying upon him the vials of my accumulated wrath. Then I thought better of it.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“Send Mr. Shipley to me at once,” I said.

The detective entered with his ever-present smile of inquiry.

“What is the nature of your duties to this company, Mr. Shipley?” I demanded abruptly.

“You know them as well as I do, Mr. Wilkinson,” was his answer in an injured tone.

“Then I want to say to you, Mr. Shipley, that for all the practical value either you or your subordinates are to this company, it might as well have a pack of school-boys. Whether it is a lack of interest or crass stupidity matters not. You are utterly valueless; your services are worse than useless.” Fortunately my increasing anger choked me off at this point.

“I think that is about enough, sir,” Mr. Shipley replied, his fleshy face turning a livid hue and his little eyes blinking.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“Enough — enough! Yes, it’s well enough for you to say that! Does it restore the lives of those who have been murdered through their trust in this corporation? Does it excuse you of gross negligence in failing to bring the criminal to justice? By heaven, sir, it does not.” I brought my fist down on the desk by way of emphasis.

The anger, the resentment faded from the detective’s face. From purple it turned a chalky white.

“What do you mean?” said Shipley, almost in a whisper.

“I mean that Mrs. Ybarra was murdered, and that it was your business to know it. I mean that the International’s honor is at stake. I mean that four hundred and fifty thousand dollars have been paid as a reward for crime, and that here, here, sir, is a demand for a hundred and fifty thousand more. For murder! Do

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

you understand that?" I had tried to say it calmly, but it was impossible.

Mr. Shipley did not understand; he could not. Had the detective never heard of crime, had he been a mere layman, he could not have been more astonished than he was upon hearing of the manner in which Mrs. Ybarra had been murdered; of the reasons for Dr. Stone's abduction, and of the adventure and narrow escape in Chinatown of Miss Ybarra and myself.

"Understand, Mr. Shipley," I concluded, "you are to learn all you can; collect as much information as possible, but under no circumstances are you to do anything without first informing me."

I felt justified in assuming personally all responsibility, and the subdued Mr. Shipley did not protest. When he left me there was a light in his little gray eyes that boded ill for some one. How he was to connect the Vice-President of the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Shasta County Mining and Development Company with these crimes I did not see, but discreetly left the working out of such details in his hands.

In accordance with my recent custom, I sought Miss Ybarra late that afternoon, and as usual I found her in the library.

“I am sorry, but you will have to excuse me,” she said, glancing coldly over the top of a book she was reading.

Something in her tone made me pause. Had I been an imaginative man I might have said that it was a studied rudeness.

“You have not recovered from your adventure then?” I ventured.

“Yes, quite, *thank you*,” she answered.

I hesitated. Yesterday, all the days before, she had been so friendly, so anxious to know whether or not I had learned anything.

“I thought that you would like to know that our detectives are doing every-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

thing possible," I faltered, hoping to note some sign of interest.

"Indeed!" There was no mistaking the tone. It was an outright dismissal.

The adventure had told upon her more than she was willing to admit, I said to myself, and bowing was about to go.

"Don't trouble to call to-morrow, nor the day after, nor at any other time, Mr. Wilkinson," she flung at me, as I paused awkwardly at the door.

The book lay on her lap, her head was thrust forward, and her voice rolled at me from the depths of anger.

Stung by the contempt in her voice, I stiffened, whirled on my heel and, crossing the intervening space, stood directly over her.

"I demand to know the reason for this, Miss Ybarra; to know why you should receive me thus, almost drive me from your house and order me not to return again.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

The awful questions that we have to meet make our interests one. Justice requires that you should explain your sudden, undisguised aversion."

"Justice! Demand!" rolled her voice, as with glowing eyes she rose and confronted me. "Mr. Wilkinson—" she caught her breath as though finding it hard to proceed, "I thought that I could —trust you. I thought—" There was a break in her voice, and she turned her back upon me and stared out the window. When she turned her face was pale and determined. "Mr. Wilkinson, I am in a hard place. I do not know what to do, who to believe. I—I can't believe that you are a villain, and yet—God help me!"

Something was amiss. Dense as I may be, I could see that.

"I can only offer my assurance that I desire to serve you," I said, earnestly, my resentment gone.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ I wish I could believe that,” she answered sorrowfully.

I devoted a few seconds to good hard thought. I might not know women, I might be entangling myself in the meshes of mystery and crime, but this I could do; I could apply business principles.

“ Who has warned you against me, Miss Ybarra? ” I asked, by way of beginning.

She paused some moments before answering. I could see that she changed her mind several times.

“ I suppose you have a right to know that,” she said at last. “ It is the opinion of my best friend, my mother’s friend, that all you have told me is false; that you have a sordid purpose to subserve, that—but that’s enough.”

“ And it never occurred to you to question the motives of this friend? To ask whether he had a purpose of his own to further? ” I asked.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Impossible! Mr. Forsythe is a man beyond reproach.”

“ Mr. Forsythe! Forsythe! ” I exclaimed incredulously. For the moment I could not believe it. I was about to say more, but checked myself. I dared not give utterance to the flood of suspicions that swept over my brain. With a simple “ good-by,” I left her.

Why had Forsythe done this, I asked myself time and again. I could find only one answer. He must be involved in the plot. Perhaps, yes—perhaps it was his hand that had struck that cunning blow. Then, when the man’s face rose up before me, I could not believe it. That gray-haired, kind-faced old man do such a thing! The idea was too revolting. What object could there be? None, absolutely none. The man was wealthy; he was bound to this family by every tie imaginable. Why, then? Why?

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Some one has said—I don't know who—“Distrust those appearances which seem inevitable.” It could not be denied that Mr. Forsythe had raised suspicions concerning me; that Miss Ybarra's mind had been poisoned against me. I would know why. I would go to Mr. Forsythe as man to man and demand an explanation. If he had any guilty secret in his heart I would wring it from him. If, in turn, his mind had been poisoned from some other source, I would discover that, and I decided that I would go to Mr. Forsythe.

Although early evening, it was quite dark before I found myself standing outside the grounds of his home. It was a small house standing in the center of several acres of ground, a house that was one of the few landmarks left of the old days.

When I placed my hand upon the lock of the gate, I was still firm in my resolve to have a friendly interview. No sooner



“There in the dark were two luminous red globes. . . . They
came slowly toward me”

Page 114

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

had the lock clicked behind me than I had a new idea. Or rather, say an old one in a stronger form. Suppose this old gentleman had played some part in the tragedy! In that case would I gain anything by going to him boldly and honestly, and asking an explanation of his actions? Certainly not. Common-sense told me that it was absurd to suspect this honest, retired merchant of connection with the murder. But it is not always common-sense that governs our actions.

Let me apply Dr. Stone's law, I thought. Might I not, by observing this man when he imagined himself alone, detect some little thing upon which to base a motive and thus reconstruct the tragedy?

It may have been the vast darkness that appealed to me; it may have been the sibilant whisperings of the eucalyptus trees. Whatever the source, I felt myself saturated with mystery and secretiveness. Yes,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

I would spy upon him. It was as much my duty to learn all I could as it was the duty of my paid detectives.

The gravel of the path crunched under my feet with an alarming loudness, so I took to the lawn. Half-way to the house I paused, startled. In sheer terror, my limbs almost gave way under me, for there in the dark were two luminous red globes, and they were about on a level with my chest. They came slowly toward me. In another instant I made out a great outline and the animal raised its head and sniffed the air.

I am not ashamed to say that if I could have run I should have done so. The thing, whatever it was, fascinated me. It was larger than the largest hound I have ever seen, and it was coming straight toward me. My face went white. I could feel that it did. I remember trying to analyze the hundred and one complex sensations

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

that I was experiencing, all the while expecting to feel the fangs of the thing at my throat. Slowly it advanced. Its breath burned my face, its eyes seared my brain. A cold muzzle touched my forehead, then, with a snort, the thing was off.

In the thick darkness I could not have known until that moment that the animal was a tame deer. Even after I learned that such was the case, the recovery of my self-command was by no means as rapid as I should have liked. I tried to laugh a little, silent laugh, but it was a mirthless one.

The house was almost square. Around three of its sides ran an open portico or veranda with another porch above it.

I crawled cautiously up on this lower porch. In front all the windows were dark. Around at one side a thousand little streams of light filtered through the crevices of the venetian blinds of two win-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

dows. I could hear voices within, but what was said I could not hear. Though the light escaped through, the little cracks were too narrow to permit me to see. There were two voices; one a man's, the other a woman's, and I had no doubt that the man's voice belonged to Mr. Forsythe.

My curiosity was aroused. Mr. Forsythe was a widower, and I had already learned that he lived alone with an elderly colored woman for housekeeper.

Leaving the lighted window, I went to the front of the house and tried the door; it was locked, so were the windows. At the rear of the house I met with no better success. Get in I would. If I should be caught I would be no better than a burglar.

It was not an easy matter to climb the pillar leading to the upper porch, but I did it, my heart in my mouth all the while. The very first window I tried gave to my touch. I lived half a lifetime in the open-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

ing of that window. When I finally stepped through it I had made not the least noise.

If you have never entered another person's house through an upper window you do not know what excitement is. There might be some one in the room. For three or four minutes my heart raced like a freed propeller, and I was ready for the sound of a police-whistle, or even a blinding flash and a loud report. I nerved myself for an attack, but there was no one in the room—I was all alone.

Before I left that room I took off my shoes. When I opened the door all of my nerves were on edge again. Thanks to the heavy carpets, I gained the stairs in safety and took a long breath. When I put my foot on the first step it gave a creak that sounded to me like a pistol-shot, and I stood still, every nerve on the stretch, and listened. As I tried to peer down the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

long succession of steps I felt my heart sink like lead. I knew that I could not do it.

An idea came to me. I would slide down the rail of the baluster—and I did, with my shoes tied together and hung about my neck. I reached the door from under which spread a band of light.

I listened. Yes, the voices were those of a man and a woman. In the tone of the latter there was something so familiar that I almost betrayed myself. I placed my eye to the keyhole, but could see nothing. Then I listened again; there was no doubt about it, the voice of the woman was a familiar one.

CHAPTER VII

If in the foregoing portion of this narrative I have refrained from speaking of my strictly private affairs, it has been because they have had no bearing upon the matters which I have been relating. Now, it becomes necessary for me to chronicle the fact that I was engaged to be married. The voice of the woman on the other side of the door was that of my future wife.

If there have been times in my life when I have been weak or undecided in my actions, this was not one of them. I was on fire with an awful anger.

Regardless of what might follow, I noiselessly struck a match and held it above my head. Before it burned out I knew my surroundings thoroughly. I felt my way to another door and opened it; as I had imagined would be the case, I found my-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

self in a room separated from its fellow by portières and a folding-door—and the doors were not quite closed. The voices came to me distinctly.

“I do not believe it; I will not believe it,” came Marion’s voice in a defiant tone.

Marion was in a rocking-chair; her locked hands, palms outward, rested on her lap, her resolute face, turned upward, bore the trace of tears. A little before her stood Mr. Forsythe, his expression more genial, more benevolent than usual.

“My dear young lady, nothing I have ever done has been harder for me than this,” he said. “Only the highest regard for your welfare, only a disinterested desire for your future happiness prompts me to speak.” The voice in which he uttered these, to me, incomprehensible words, choked and broke.

“No, no, no! Mr. Tobias Wilkinson do a dishonorable thing! No, Mr. Forsythe,



“ ‘And it is you, Mr. Forsythe, you, who have imbued your
hands in innocent blood! ’ ”

Page 122

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

when I see the proofs of his falseness myself, then shall I believe. And now, I shall thank you to have me taken home." Marion rose as though the interview was ended.

" You doubt, then, that Mr. Wilkinson is devoting much of his time and attention to this young woman? You decline to believe that he is ruining, not only your life, but that of another estimable young woman as well? "

" Yes, I decline," came the quick reply.

" Then I can only say that I am sorry for you, my little girl. I have done all that an old man can do. I hope that you will not misunderstand my motive. But I could not do otherwise than warn you. I remembered that, had I a daughter of my own, I should thank some one to whisper words of good counsel in her ear. Remember, my dear, I am an old man, a very

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

old man, and have seen much of the evil in the world. Go where I have told you. See for yourself."

I could stand it no longer. Mr. Forsythe's back was turned to me, therefore he did not observe the parting of the curtains. I tried not to make my entrance too stagy, but I fear the next five minutes reeked of melodrama at popular prices—the villain foiled, the heroine in the hero's arms.

I poured forth my opinion of Mr. Forsythe in a torrent of words, clasping my Marion ever tighter in my arms. I ended, if I remember aright—

“ And it is you, Mr. Forsythe, you, who have imbrued your hands in innocent blood! You, who poison the minds of trusting women and revel in crime! ”

The villain foiled? Yes. But he did not look such a villain after all. Only a poor, weak, timid old man stood before

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

me. "Have you anything to say?" I thundered. But I wavered, despite myself.

"You—you meant no wrong?" he stammered. His lips trembled piteously and senile tears were in his eyes.

"Mr. Forsythe," I said, less harshly, "doubtless all this can be explained. We shall see." The last words I uttered very gently.

Leading Marion to the back parlor, I lighted the gas, placed a book in her hands and bade her wait. Then, returning to the other room, I closed the door.

"Now, Mr. Forsythe, we will understand each other once for all." I forced him to a seat directly in front of me.

He sat with bowed head and did not answer. He was silent for so long a time that I had to speak again.

"I desire to know by what means you induced Miss Martin to enter this house,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

and why she is here. I have a right to know," I concluded.

Mr. Forsythe raised his eyes; with one frail hand he grasped the arm of his chair, his face was haggard.

" You have accused me of murder," he rasped out.

" Your actions have been suspicious," I answered, firmly. " No one but an interested person would have done as you have. The only motive I can assume is that you desire to conceal the evidence of a crime."

" Perhaps I have done wrong. If I have, it has been with the best of intentions."

" We have come to the place where only full explanation will set matters right." I found it very hard, in fact impossible, to say the harsh things I had felt.

The old man seemed to brighten at this, and gave his explanation. It was that, having known Miss Ybarra from her in-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

fancy, having always been an intimate friend of her parents he had felt that he was now her sole protector. Miss Ybarra had made him the recipient of her confidences concerning the theory I had advanced regarding her mother's death, and he had been unable to believe in it. Seeking for some reason that I might have for advancing such a theory he had decided that my designs must be evil, and that I was taking advantage of an unprotected, impulsive girl. He ended by saying that he knew the young men of the day to be less scrupulous than they had been in his time, and that as Miss Ybarra had failed to believe in his frankly expressed lack of confidence in me, he had considered himself justified in adopting any means for putting a stop to my calling upon her.

“ And how and why was Miss Martin induced to come here? ” I asked.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Believing me to be a scoundrel, he had considered it to be his duty to thwart me in all of my evil designs. I might ask Miss Martin how she had been induced to come. "And now," he concluded, his old voice strong with the conviction of being in the right, "you have your opportunity for defending yourself. How do you come to be in the house? Why?"

The situation was reversed. I looked at Mr. Forsythe in astonishment. Suddenly I became possessed with a desire to have him think better of me.

I told him exactly what I thought; I convinced him of what I knew. I did not spare him the suspicions I had entertained of himself.

"Young man, we have both been wrong," he said, putting out his hand and clasping mine warmly. "I am sorry, very sorry for having thought evil of you. I believe now that you have acted honestly

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

and with the best of intentions. I believe in you."

I did not doubt it, and was proud of having won his good opinion. We agreed to forget the mistakes we had made and to trust and help each other in the future.

"And Miss Ybarra?" I questioned.

"I will acknowledge to her freely how great an injustice I have done you. And now, my dear young man, we must not keep the young lady waiting longer."

With a finely patronizing air he threw wide the doors, brought my Marion in, and bade her forget what he so recently had said. Within a very few minutes we were inclined to feel that we were his debtors, and that he had laid us under lasting obligations.

I could but feel sorry for Mr. Forsythe. A dozen times did he insist that we should permit him to be our host at a

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

little banquet, as many times did we refuse. Refusals were of no avail.

Never shall I forget the merry, care-free party we were as we sat around the table in the cozy little dining-room of a restaurant. When, finally, we rose to go, my heart was warm with the good Chianti, and we took leave of Mr. Forsythe regretfully.

As we boarded an outgoing car, a villainous-looking "greaser" got on at the same time. He was so dirty, so repulsive, that instinctively I drew Marion's arm closer within my own and took another look at the fellow.

His complexion was brown almost to chocolate, and an ugly blue-white scar, commencing in the hair of the forehead, ran clear across his face, barely missing the eye and ending at the angle of the jaw. Strangest of all, though, was the fact that his eyes were blue.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

The distance we had to go was not great. When we alighted from the car, the evil-visaged stranger stepped off the opposite side, and immediately disappeared. I should have thought nothing more of him had it not been that a few minutes later I happened to glance behind me. In the distance, barely discernible, was a figure —it was following us. It was less dark now than earlier in the evening, and it seemed to me that the skulking form must be that of the scar-faced greaser.

I said nothing to my companion, but we walked a little faster. A backward glance showed me that the man had increased his gait accordingly. Whether we walked fast or slow, he followed just at a certain distance.

I was not sorry when we reached the little flat in which Miss Martin lived. Having seen her safely within the door, I hurried back over the route we had come,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

anxious for an opportunity of leading my follower into the arms of a policeman. To my surprise I found him waiting for me at the corner. When I approached he did not move on as I had expected he would, but, folding his arms across his great, ragged chest, stood still. Seeing that I hesitated, he came toward me.

“ Stay back or I’ll shoot,” I shouted, brandishing my silver cigarette-case.

“ Ees et Senior Wilkenson? ” he asked, edging toward me.

“ Well, what of it? ”

“ Doctair Stone send me—” he began.

“ Yes, I’ve heard that story before. I’ll shoot if you don’t get out of here,” I shouted hoarsely, brandishing the cigarette case again and hoping he would not recognize what it was.

“ Did I do it so well as that, Toby? Is it possible that you don’t know me? ” said

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

the man in a voice that I would have sworn was Dr. Stone's. Then he brought his hand down on his thigh and laughed, a low, long laugh.

I couldn't answer; it was too much for me. The voice was Stone's, there the resemblance ended.

“Come, Toby, I know you never carry a pistol; we'll go home.” He came close to me. Before I realized what he was doing he had thrust his ragged sleeve into the crook of my arm.

“I—I don't understand,” I stammered. “It can't be you, Stone! By heaven, it's your voice! Why, Stone, is it you? Is it you?” I exclaimed, seizing him about the waist in my enthusiasm. “Where have you been?”

“Never mind, you'll know soon enough,” in the old familiar drawl. “Now, here comes a car—last one, too.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Don't appear to know me. Get off when I do; follow wherever I lead you."

He swung himself upon the front end of the car before it stopped, and I climbed upon the rear.

CHAPTER VIII

As the car rolled along on its in-town journey, I ventured, from time to time, to glance at the repulsive creature who was huddled on the open seat of the front of the car, and who said that he was Dr. Stone, and wondered if I was awake.

At this point in my meditations the car stopped. The man in front threw a sharp glance inside and rose to alight; I did the same.

Had any one seen so ill-assorted a pair as the scar-faced vagabond and myself enter Dr. Stone's office at this late hour, it is probable that we should shortly have had a policeman after us.

The door closed behind us with a click of the spring-latch, the lamp-switch snapped, and the room was aflood with light.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Ah, Toby, it’s good to be back,” smiled my companion.

I did not answer. If he had been a vicious-looking rascal in the half-light of car and streets, he was more than a villain now. Out at the elbows, trousers old, torn and baggy at the knees; shoes that once may have been black, but were now a moldy gray and surely had never come from the same neat box; there was a world of history in those unfraternizing shoes. But my eyes skipped from them to the face again. What a nasty scar it was across that mahogany face, and how it glistened and threw back the light, and how sardonically it twisted up a corner of the mouth! But the sky-blue of the eyes laughed at me and peered down into my soul.

“ Ah, I can’t make up my mind that it’s you, even now! ” I cried, seizing him by the hand.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Yes, it’s I, Toby, dear boy,” he answered, in a far-away sort of voice. “ That is, what’s left of me. But it seemed you would never come out of that restaurant. I was hanging around outside, half-famished.”

“ What! You’re not hungry? ” I exclaimed.

“ Well, rather! Suppose you could get me anything to eat? Ah, this is something like! ” He stretched himself at full length on the couch. “ There was many a day when I thought of this old couch,” he drawled in the old inimitable way, with what should have been a smile, but which became a hideous leer instead because of the scar.

“ You are not well, Doctor! ” I exclaimed impulsively. “ You are not wounded? ”

“ No, my dear boy, never was better in my life. Troubles are all over now. Had

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

a pretty close squeak for it, and there was a time when I thought that I'd never have a look at you again, Toby. But that's a thing of the past. Serves me right; serves me right! Look around in that cupboard in the operating room and see if there isn't a little brandy. I think it would brace me up a bit," he said. "Ah, that's better; nerves a little off-color, I guess. But it's my feelings that hurt me most. How about that something to eat? I haven't been wined and dined, you know."

Without waiting for a second hint, I rushed out of the door.

I worked myself into a fever before I succeeded in finding an all-night coffee-house, but I hurried back with a pitcher of strong coffee and some food that was nourishing at least. Stone lay on the couch just as I had left him, and I was much relieved to find that he had not fainted from exhaustion.



“ ‘There was many a day when I thought of this old couch,’ he drawled.”

Page 135

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

His leer of approbation and his evident enjoyment were sufficient thanks. When he finally lay back again, he seemed to take pleasure in keeping me waiting while he blew wreaths of smoke at the ceiling.

“To think that I stepped right into the trap, just as though I had been an ordinary fool,” he mused.

“I thought so, I thought so!” I exclaimed. “Do you know that your cab had hardly started when I had a conviction that everything was not all right.”

“It was not long before I began to have such convictions myself,” he answered with another attempt at a smile.

“Where have you been, though? How did you get away? I followed the Chinaman you sent me, and was nearly murdered for doing so, besides putting Miss Ybarra in a fearfully tight place.”

“What?” sharply. “I didn’t send any Chinaman.” He sat up, bringing his teeth together with a click.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ That’s what I decided—after the thing was over.”

“ Well, we might as well begin where we left off—in front of my rooms. The horses started out at a pretty lively gait, and it seemed that we were an exceedingly long time in reaching Rincon Hill. When we did stop I saw that we were out in the suburbs somewhere, and—well, that was about all that I did see, for just then I caught a whiff of chloroform, felt an arm go ’round my neck, and then my head was jerked back and a handkerchief with the sickeningly sweet stuff on it was over my mouth and nose. Now a man don’t drop at the first whiff of the drug, you know, and I gave the fellow that was holding me a pretty tussle for awhile. But I got the worst of it in the end. It was a handicap that I couldn’t beat. But I marked him, Toby, indeed I did.”

“ I knew it, I knew it! ” I cried, spring-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

ing to my feet. “ The murdering scoundrels, we will fix them for this. Why didn’t I have that man Garthwait arrested the next day? ”

“ Cool down a bit, Toby, and give me a chance to get on. I didn’t say anything about Garthwait.”

I was about to break forth again, but he waved me to silence.

“ The next thing I knew was that a yellow light was shining in my eyes, and that I was aches and pains all over, and sleepy, too, and didn’t care for anything. So I just closed my eyes to shut out the light, and went to sleep again. When I wakened the second time the light was still there. Well, Toby, I must have been pretty well dosed with anaesthetics, for I still felt disinclined to move and my brain was foggy. It took all the will I could muster even to desire to think. At length I gained sufficient energy to sit up and look about me.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ The yellow light, I discovered, was an incandescent globe swinging by a cord. I argued from this that I was still in the city, and of course knew that I had been abducted and had made a fool of myself generally. Before taking further observations, I sprang out on the floor and began swinging my arms and going through a few exercises. This brightened me up somewhat, and I felt more like examining my surroundings. The room was small; the furniture consisted of the cot on which I had been lying, a washstand and a chair. It was plain enough that I was in a cellar, or basement of some sort, for there were no windows and only one door, and the room was damp and cold. I now discovered that on the washstand there was a bottle of cheap red wine and a long loaf of French bread. Before touching either of them I sat down to figure the thing out.

“ It was plain that the scheme had been

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

hastily devised and that my captors had not yet concluded what disposal they would make of me; therefore it would be safe enough for me to eat the food, as it was not poisoned. There was a deal of satisfaction in being alive and with a fighting chance ahead. A stale French loaf is not the most appetizing thing in the world, and the wine was more like vinegar than anything I had ever tasted. I shouldn't care for it as a steady diet, Toby.

“‘ What will be the ultimate disposal of me? ’ That was the question I had to solve. There were two answers to it. Either I might be made away with, or I might be put aboard some outbound vessel and shipped before the mast. It was hardly worth while to kill me, for my life was worth nothing to the criminals, it could not be turned into money. All that was desired was to get me out of the way temporarily.”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ You didn’t sit down there in that dungeon and reason all that out? ” I interrupted.

“ Certainly; why not? ” he answered. “ I was in pretty good spirits after I had come to my conclusions, for at the most it only meant the loss of six months or a year, even if I were shipped to the Arctic; besides, my pockets had not been rifled, and I had my very own brand of cigarettes to comfort me.”

“ You were extremely sure of everything, it seems to me,” I growled.

“ No more so than I was justified in being, Tobias. If I were to detail the processes of my reasoning you would follow it readily enough, but it would take too long, so you will have to accept the statement of conclusions and let it go at that. My only regret was Miss Ybarra. Somehow when I thought of her I felt as though I could not spare the time. As for

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

you, Toby, I felt that you were in no danger, and that I should see you in good time. I had reason to change my mind later—but I'm getting ahead of my story. As I was sitting there, blowing rings at the yellow light, I heard a little rattle at the door and a slip of paper was shoved in.

“ ‘ If your life is spared, will you keep silence forever? ’ That was all. About as quick a proof of the soundness of my theory as I could have asked, eh, Toby?

“ It was a poser, Toby. I knew well enough that I wouldn’t keep silence, and I would not lie. I did not feel that I had absolutely the worst of it yet, you see. I simply wrote ‘ No ’ on the back of the paper and thrust it under the door. I knew that the man on the other side was waiting for his answer.

“ What was to happen next it was beyond me to imagine. I knew that the slipping of my answer under the door marked

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

a change in my affairs. The simple question conveyed a threat. An attempt was to be made upon my life; the easiest thing would be to starve me to death. What really did happen gave me the first insight into something I had not before suspected—I'll tell you what it was further on.

“ Some time after I had thrown myself on the cot and fallen into a light sleep, I was overpowered. Never mind the details, Toby, it is sufficient to say that I had no chance, and that I was thrust head first into a canvas bag and picked up about as gently as though I had been a sack of potatoes. The subsequent jolting and jarring and tossing about left me pretty well bruised. As not much air came into the bag I was nearly suffocated.

“ Possibly it was an hour—it may have been longer—before a gentle rocking told me that I was on the water. Then I made sure that it was the Arctic I was bound

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

for. Oh, yes, I forgot to say that it was a launch I was on; I could hear the throb of the engine. Well, to get at the end of it, the launch thumped up against something, two people picked me up again and carried me a little way, then plumped me down. There was the sound of a knife cutting a cord, the retreating of footsteps; then all was still.

“As you will readily imagine, Toby, I had some curiosity to know what it all meant; to know where I was. No one interfered with me in my effort to release myself from the canvas bag; but, notwithstanding that, I was so closely confined in it, had so little room for the movement of my limbs, that it was a good quarter of an hour before I shook the thing off and breathed a mouthful of decent air. And such air! Sweet as—but there, it is no use, there is nothing worthy of comparison. If you have never breathed your own

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

vitiated, hot breath over and over again, you cannot know what it means to be struck fairly in the face by a cold, wet blast straight off the salty bay. I found myself on the ground and above me the unclouded blue dome and the Milky Way. In my ears was the sound of water breaking on a shore; off in the distance somewhere a siren called to the deep; in the foreground of the sound-picture was the fading whisper of an engine.

“ The long and the short of it, Toby, as it took me until morning to discover, was that I was marooned on a little island. The intent was evident as soon as I had looked around me by daylight. No extra clothing, no place of shelter and nothing to eat. Simple enough, isn’t it? I was to be starved, after all. Fortunately there was a little, a very little water on my new domain, and there, less than a mile from me, was the mainland and a good-sized town.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Ingenious, wasn't it? I couldn't help admiring the man who had planned it out so thoroughly.

"I had plenty of time for thinking--"

"Where was this island? How large was it?" I broke in.

"Over on the north side of the bay somewhere, and not much larger than a city block. My thoughts were very entertaining, even if I did have only five cigarettes and nothing to eat. Here was a problem worth while. You would be astonished to know what I figured out; it was chastening to my spirit, Toby. It left me with somewhat less of conceit and self-esteem than I have been accustomed to feeling. That sojourn on a few acres of rock taught me a lesson. I found out why Mrs. Ybarra was murdered sooner than she should have been; I learned why I was in my present situation rather than murdered outright. It was this—I was

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

fighting against a crooked mind.” He closed his eyes and seemed to lose himself in a reverie that lasted too long for my patience.

“ Well! ” I said breathlessly. “ Go on! ”

“ It’s such a delightful puzzle, Toby. Yes, yes! Well, when I stated my law to you, and when I put it into operation, I was playing against a sane criminal. Here was proof enough to me that I was dealing with a mind that was not normal—with a monomaniac. Worthy game! I need not hesitate at any daring fancy in following this mind. I was free to give my fancy play, to direct my imagination into channels that had hitherto been closed, to send it journeying on aerial flights that, under other circumstances, would have passed the boundaries of the absurd. But I’ll come back to my theories later.

“ There was not much chance of my

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

escaping. I was just as well satisfied that out there on the mainland some one watched me during the day through a good glass as though I could see him. I did think of trying to make it in a dry-goods box, the only bit of wood on my island, but I gave it up. Toward the end of the second day I managed to attract the attention of a market-hunter.

“ See how it all works out, though! ” he continued, half-rising and punctuating his remarks with his index finger. “ Had it been dark I might have made it. But, had it been dark the man would not have found me. A nice long row it was toward the shore, and the hunter, being an Italian, couldn’t understand a word I said to him. On the surface of the thing it looked like a rescue. But no, it was not to be.” Dr. Stone dropped back on his couch and settled himself for a comfortable rest.

CHAPTER IX

“I’m afraid I’m disgracefully lazy, Toby,” he said at length, propping himself up on one elbow. “Fact is, I’m a bit done. Let’s see, I left off in the boat, didn’t I? Well, just as I had foreseen, we were intercepted by another boat. Two men were in it, in uniforms of prison guards, donned for the occasion. The poor Italian was frightened half to death and—I was in the toils again. Really, I enjoyed the irony of it all. Unfortunately, the edge of my appreciation was dulled somewhat because of my prolonged fast.”

“What happened next?” I asked anxiously. “Were you taken to the same place as before?”

“Oh, no, Toby. Have you no imagination? Can’t you enter into the spirit of the thing? The game was too good to

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

spoil.” He lay looking at me with an expectant look on his face. I shook my head. “ If you won’t guess, I suppose I’ll have to help you. A blindfold, the same old launch, and a good long ride on the water, a transfer from the boat to a cab, a flight of stairs and the banging of a door make up the sum of what happened in what may have been the next two hours. About the most desirable thing I remember ever having looked upon was before my eyes when I tore the bandage from them—it was a little table loaded with almost everything a hungry man would enjoy.

“ Nor was I thrust into an underground hole this time,” he continued. “ The room was large, airy and tastily furnished. There were two windows, but both of them were closed by outside wooden shutters. Above the table hung a small-size arc-lamp. I was beginning to wonder when some one would appear—that is, I did after I had

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

eaten all I desired. One of the doors opened and my question was answered. In the doorway stood a Japanese boy.

“ Now, Toby, instead of pouncing on that little fellow I merely smiled at him, and he entered and began clearing the table, having left the door open behind him. In answer to my salutation he only grinned, but when I asked him for something to smoke he nodded his head. Then, in the most natural manner in the world, I rose and walked toward the open door.

“ ‘ I wouldn’t do that,’ said a voice behind me.

“ I whirled ’round. ‘ Did you speak? ’ I asked the Jap. He shook his head as though he did not know what I was talking about. I knew that it couldn’t have been his voice, because the English was perfect. I again walked toward the door, sideways.

“ ‘ You cannot get out that way,’ came

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

the voice, seemingly from somewhere in the air.

“ I knew the Jap did not say it. In fact he appeared not to have heard. Uncanny, eh, Toby! Well, I put it down as a speaking-tube, or something of that sort —in which I was quite wrong—and walked into the other room. Evidently everything had been thought out beforehand, for this room had shutters also, was unfurnished, and the door was locked. It was merely for the convenience of the Jap, and I was certain that he did not have the key of the outer door.

“ ‘ Very sensible,’ said the voice when I came back into my own room and sat down.

“ The boy carried his tray into the other room, locked the door, and I was alone once more. In a little while he came back with some cigarettes, very fair kind, too.

“ ‘ Good-night! ’ said the voice.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ For a moment it irritated me. It wasn’t a speaking-tube, of that much I was certain; the sound came directly from the center of the room—not from the floor or the ceiling, but apparently from the air in the center of the room. I decided to study out the whole situation. Since I had a peculiar mind to deal with, it made the problem much harder. I felt certain that my life was now in more imminent danger than it had ever been before. I was watched, my every movement spied upon. And the voice? Ah! that was very cunning, more cunning than I could at that time imagine. My fears were evidently to be worked upon. I was to be made to believe that I was going mad. I was to convince myself that I heard things which were inaudible to others. Driven to desperation, I should make an attempt upon my life. I had no doubt that I should be given ample opportunity.”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Devilish! The work of a fiend!” I burst out indignantly.

“ Wait, Toby, the best is coming. Having been denied the luxury of a bed for three nights, I turned in with considerable satisfaction. Hardly had I laid my head on the pillow when there came to my ears a low, soft, sweet sound—the sound of a woman’s voice singing a lullaby. Toby, the music was in the room!

“ What a world of tender feeling was in that voice! How it rose and fell in the sweetest of cradle songs. It carried me back, back to the time when I was a child and innocent. Never was such music. Ah, the pathos of the mother love as it rose and fell, and rose and fell, hushing the baby to slumber. I could close my eyes and hear the creak of the old rocking-chair, feel the clasp of a mother’s arm, the caress of a mother’s lips. And still it rose and fell, lowly, softly, sweetly, this

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

mother's song; she sang with her heart in her voice, sang with her soul in her eyes. It was the incarnation of all mother loves.

"What though the voice came from space, and there was in reality no woman there. It was the music, the dear, true music of love. I was sorry when the song was finished. I had not only enjoyed the music, but I had learned its source. Every word of it came straight from the arc-lamp, from the white-hot ends of the carbons."

I looked at him apprehensively. I looked him in the eyes. "From the lamp?" I said, slowly, incredulously. "From the lamp? Are you sure?" And I scanned the blue eyes again.

"Yes," lowly. "As I am alive and sane, Toby, the voice, the dear, sweet voice came from the lamp," he said solemnly. "You wonder——" He put his finger to his forehead, and I looked down.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

We were both silent for a little while. He was the first to speak.

“ It’s not right to worry you, Toby. Of course you want to know all about it, and still I wish you didn’t,” he smiled. “ When you spoil the mystery the charm is gone. The whole thing is capable of explanation. It was a trick, a device to drive me mad. Wonderful, if you don’t know science. Wonderfully cheap if you do. It was what is called a singing-arc. If I had not dabbled in a little of everything, I should have been deceived—merely a telephone placed in circuit with an arc-lamp, you know, and a first-class phonograph.

“ After that the thing talked to me constantly, day and night. Now it would be music, then it would be only the voice. I can easily believe that the thing might have driven some men mad. But, having the solution, it was merely so much diver-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

sion to me. Here is the point, though—that person who was ever watching and waiting for an effect must be anxiously expecting the commission of some unusual act upon my part. The razor that I found on my dresser had been placed there with the hope that I would use it to end my life. For another thing, I had not been deprived of my hypodermic case. Things were bound to come to a focus. The voice now invited me to self-destruction. Cunningly, mind you, ingeniously. When several bottles of poison were left conveniently upon my dresser, I knew that the moment to act had come. Either I was to administer to myself the fatal dose, or have it forced upon me. There was the choice: chloral-hydrate, morphine, or prussic acid—my friend of the crooked mind was tiring of the game.

“ This was the problem: If I voluntarily took the stuff, was there not a possi-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

bility of my being able to govern the result? Then I did think. The result was that I measured out a fatal dose of chloral-hydrate—and took it."

I gasped.

"Never mind, I'm safe, Toby," he assured me. "It was either that, or take my chances with prussic acid. I had calculated pretty closely before I took the stuff, and had preceded it with a hypodermic of strychnine, to strengthen the heart. Well, from here I can not tell you exactly what happened, except as I reconstruct the case. I lost consciousness, and I must have presented all the appearances of death. Even if I were not quite dead, it did not make much difference to my host. Candidly, I shall never cut it quite so fine again.

"I suppose, in fact I know, that I was placed in a coffin, probably put on a train. At any rate, I arrived at a crematory in San Mateo County. Some very appropriate

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

services were held over me in the chapel of the crematory. I went down the elevator to slow music, and, so far as the versatile originator of the whole thing knows, I am to-day so much ashes.

“ The retort was at a white heat, and I was about to be thrust in; only, as I had felt sure would be the case, there was the customary alum-soaked sheet. That did it. When the cold cloth touched my bare skin the diaphragm gave a jump—and I made a gasp for air.

“ You ought to have seen the commotion there was in the private part of that crematory when I finally sat up in the midst of a little gathering of officials of the institution and a doctor. They had worked over me a good while, if the sweat on the doctor’s face was any indication. I tell you, Toby, you can almost always count on the involuntary muscles making a protest when subjected to sudden stimulus.



““The retort was at a white heat, and I was about to be thrust in””

Page 160

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DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Of course they had reasons of their own for not wanting the story to get out. You can easily imagine what they were. And, on my side, I wanted to keep it quiet too. I could go on giving you details till daylight, but what is the use? You have the gist of the story. I’ll bring it up to the present, then we’ll have a little sleep. I did not wish my kindly disposed friend to know how his plans had turned out—it might have hurt his feelings. And then, well, I had another reason, I wanted to present him with a little surprise one of these days in the person of myself. But that’s a boyish thing to think of.”

“ And bring him to justice, too! ” I exclaimed.

“ Justice? Well, I suppose so; I hadn’t thought of that. I’m not vindictive, you know. I don’t hold it against him. But, to get on. The only thing to do was to assume a disguise. The spirit of adventure

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

seized me. I shall write a book about disguises one of these days and point out their general uselessness; but I think this one is pretty good. Juice of the black-walnut makes a pretty color, eh?

“ And there is the scar. I do not think you could find anything better in its way than this scar. I simply painted it with collodion, and, as you see, the effect is realistic enough.

“ Now you want to know how I found you? Simple enough. Followed you from the time you left your office this afternoon until I met you at the corner. The hardest part was waiting outside the restaurant while you gormandized. And now, Toby, it is four o'clock. I simply will have a few hours sleep. There is another couch in the corner, and I should advise you to do the same, you will be more fit in the morning. No, save your story until then. It will keep.”

CHAPTER X

“A few hours’ sleep!” I thought, as I turned over on the couch for about the fiftieth time. Dr. Stone’s low, regular breathing came to my ears, but for me sleep was impossible; my mind was too active, my ears too keenly sensitive to the sounds of the street.

It was in vain that I tried to lose myself even for a minute. I could not, and so I turned my eyes to the window and watched the black of the sky turn to blue, and the blue turn to a lighter blue, till at length the mysterious changes from night to day had all been rung, and the sun was peeping over the top of an adjacent chimney-pot. Then Dr. Stone stirred, turned over, and sat up.

“A good forty winks, Toby,” he said cheerily. “Wait till I wash the sand out

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

of my eyes; then you must tell me what has occurred in my absence."

And I told him, and he listened with his chin in his hands and his encouraging eyes upon me.

"But, here is the important question, Doctor. How do you account for the fact that the men concerned learned that we had divined their plans? No one, other than ourselves, was aware of our opinions," I said.

The pitying look he threw me was quite lost. "I do not want to make a mystery of it, Toby. Think it out for yourself. Was really no one else aware of the conclusions that we had reached?"

"Only——" I began.

"Never mind. We shall see in the end," he interrupted.

"Well, then, the end. What is that to be?"

"I don't know as yet. I have hardly

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

given it serious consideration. I think that I shall devote a month or so to analysis of certain forms of monomania. I wonder," musingly, " whether it would be possible to lay down a law for the workings of such minds. Of course it would be subject to so many variations and exceptions as to make it exceedingly complex. But might not even these complexities and variations be charted out with considerable certainty? Is it possible for the healthy mind to follow the diseased mind?" Covering his face with his hands, he rested his elbows on his knees and lost himself in thought.

"O Doctor," I groaned in despair, " of what use to the world is all this theorizing?"

"Why, Toby," with an ingenuous smile, it increases knowledge and advances science. The practical man applies the theories of the speculative man and has his reward in the applause of achievement.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

But the scientific theorist revels in the actual growth of his theory; his reward is in the knowledge of honest work well done."

"Stone! Won't you understand?" I said, losing my temper. "Here is a dangerous madman abroad. You have already convinced me that he is the tool of a scheming villain too shrewd to commit his own crimes. It is not a personal matter. Be practical! This is not the time to stand aside and study."

Dr. Stone looked at me, his eyes round with surprise.

"I'm in earnest," I answered. "I appeal to you to help me. I ask it as a personal favor. You are the only man who can bring the case to a successful and satisfactory issue."

"What would you have me do? Turn policeman?" he asked quizzically.

"Yes, if necessary. What I do want you to do, Doctor, is to see this thing

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

through. Think of Miss Ybarra. Her life has been attempted once.” Having played my strongest card, I waited anxiously for the result.

Dr. Stone rose, took a few turns across the room, then, abruptly halting before me, took hold of both my shoulders and held me at arm’s length.

“ Toby, you are right. I should not have begun this investigation if I did not intend to carry it through to the end. I’ll undertake the task, on one condition.”

“ Well?”

“ It is that you place the whole machinery of your office at my disposal. We both know that this man Garthwait is the man who originated the scheme, and he is the man who has reaped the profits. I know who actually committed the crimes, but I have a good reason for not telling you, for which secretiveness you will have to pardon me. But,” he paused significantly,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ there is not a particle of evidence against either of these persons, and it takes evidence to convict—material proof.” He sat down and lost himself in thought.

“ Yes, I think I see how it is to be done,” he said, more to himself than to me. Then he continued with more spirit, “ Of course it will not do for me to come to life. First, I’ll get this stain off my face; then we’ll have something to eat.”

He set about his preparations in a businesslike way. When he returned from the operating room, into which he had disappeared for a few minutes, he had wrought a marvelous change in his appearance.

Dr. Stone, white again and clad in a decent suit of clothes, but minus his blond mustache, was almost a stranger to me. Not satisfied with this simple change, he proceeded to make a scar across one cheek. Then he telephoned to a hotel and engaged

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

rooms under the name of Herr Von Deitman.

“ I think that I can pass as a Heidelberg student now; ain’t it, Toby? ” he said, with a slight German accent. “ Fortunately I speak German.”

Later we entered my office in the International.

“ How many men are connected with this branch? ” he asked.

“ Five.”

“ Have them in here, one at a time.”

“ Mr. Shipley,” I began, when that inspector entered, “ this is Herr Carl Von Deitman. You will consider yourself under his orders for the present.”

“ Mr. Shipley,” Dr. Stone began, without preamble, “ Edward Martini committed suicide in an insane asylum, and you reported that there were no suspicious circumstances connected with the case.”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ There were none,” was the detective’s quick reply.

“ Pardon me, there were, but you did not perceive them. Did this young man die at a public or a private institution? ”

“ Private,” doggedly. “ A resort for nervous and mental diseases.”

“ Exactly. Young Martini had hallucinations of persecution, had he not? ”

“ I don’t know, sir. It is not my business to diagnose different kinds of insanity.”

I saw that Dr. Stone first choked back a retort, then smiled affably.

“ Very good, Mr. Shipley. I do not wish to teach you your business. Are you, or are you not willing to work under my directions for one week? ” This last in the most velvety tones.

The detective hesitated. “ I will,” he decided, after a struggle.

“ Thank you. If I may count upon the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

same cheerful assistance from the other gentlemen I think that—well—I may promise you a surprise, and all the glory that may go with it."

"The others will stand by you, sir," was the answer.

"I want you, Mr. Shipley, to go to this private retreat and discover exactly what it was that Mr. Martini used to see. I want to know why he was afraid to live. I do not care how you get your information; but get it. Find out, also, the names of all persons who were in the habit of visiting him; how often they came, and whether they were left alone with the patient or not. I will add this much for your guidance—you will find that Mr. Martini was invariably much worse after the visit of some one person. You will, unless I am grossly at fault, find that there was one nurse, or attendant, whom the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

young man fancied, and to whom he sometimes confided his hallucinations."

Mr. McBride, the next inspector admitted, was an undersized, nervous little Scotchman who received his instructions without comment.

"Your duties are not difficult," Dr. Stone said to him. "You will learn the names of the guests present at the home of Mr. La Rue upon the night of his death. You will also learn all the details possible concerning each of them. You will find that one of the guests in particular insisted upon engaging the host in a game of billiards upon that last night. You will ascertain that a new supply of chalk had been procured within a day or so of that final game."

"You want to know who bought the chalk?" asked Mr. McBride.

"No, that is not necessary, for it was procured in the usual way—by one of the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

servants probably. However, you may inquire whether or not one of the guests had ever been seen to put a cube of the chalk into his pocket."

To another inspector he assigned the duty of watching Mr. Garthwait and reporting his every movement. To the fourth he gave instructions to trace Mr. Garthwait's antecedents; at the same time he told the inspector that he must find evidence that would prove Mr. Wilson, Mr. Berber and Mr. Garthwait to be one and the same person. The fifth inspector he held in reserve.

"Now, Toby," he said, turning to me, "we shall begin to see results very soon.

"I have saved the nicest bit of work for you," he concluded. "You are to work out the Ybarra case. No, you can do what you are told as well as the rest of them," he added hastily, at my sign of protest. "Mr. Forsythe having explained away the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

bad impression that he created the other day, you will find yourself well received. I desire you to make inquiry concerning the number of callers received by Mrs. Ybarra the day before her death and, also, on the day preceding that; to learn who they were, how long their calls lasted, and whether the daughter was not away one afternoon.”

CHAPTER XI

I did not see Dr. Stone again until the following morning. He was at the office even before myself and plunged directly into the matter at hand.

"It may interest you," he said, with the musical foreign intonation of Herr Von Deitman, "to learn that I have been cultivating the acquaintance of our friend Mr. Garthwait."

"You risked talking to him, and had no fear of his knowing who you are?" I asked incredulously.

"Of course not. Please remember that I am Herr Von Deitman of Heidelberg."

"And you learned---?"

"That he speaks very delightful German; that he has traveled extensively and intends to go abroad again very shortly. I was a little curious to know whether he

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

was the man who chloroformed me. He was. His left ear bore a little red mark, where it had been split by the cameo on my ring. He did not devise the thing, though—the other man did that. Before you make your report—has it ever occurred to you that it is strange that the Ybarra murder is the only one in which the criminal actually committed murder? What have you to report?"

"That on the day preceding her death, Mrs. Ybarra received no callers, and that her daughter was with her almost constantly during the whole of that time, as Mrs. Ybarra was suffering from a severe headache."

"And the day before?"

"The mother was alone much of the afternoon. She received several callers—her sister, a Mr. Leonard and Mr. Forsythe."

"Yes."

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ The sister we can of course exclude from the investigation,” I continued; “ and Mr. Forsythe, as you know, has been a friend of the family for many years and is an impulsive, warm-hearted old gentleman for whom I have the very highest regard; he made a handsome reparation for the unintentional injury he had done me in the eyes of Miss Ybarra, and I am sorry that I shall not have the pleasure of meeting him again for some little time.”

“ Has he gone away? ” asked Dr. Stone sharply.

“ Only to his ark up the bay, where he is entertaining a friend. That leaves us with but Mr. Leonard to consider, and, as his call lasted for less than five minutes and the maid was in the adjoining room during the entire time, it seems to me we are as much in the dark as ever.”

“ No, not quite,” came enigmatically

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

from Dr. Stone. “Ah! What is this?” as a yellow envelope was brought in. “‘ Will report at nine to-morrow, Shipley,’ ” Dr. Stone read aloud. “That’s good. Now, how about your adventure in Chinatown? Now that we are proceeding upon practical lines, it behooves us to neglect nothing.”

“Why, there isn’t anything to be learned there, is there?” I asked. In my heart I desired to stay far away from that evil-smelling, mysterious section of the city.

“That remains to be seen. The man who was so, ah—let us say fortunate, as to enter the room instead of yourself, has, in all probability, gone to sojourn with his illustrious ancestors. Rather strange, at first thought, that our friends the murderers should have employed Chinamen to do their work; but that is where the hand of

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

the artist shows. Do you think that you could find that place again? ”

“ Perhaps,” I answered dubiously.

“ And would you recognize the face of the fellow who stopped your guide in the hall? ”

I was positive that I could. I should have known that yellow face and been able to pick it out from among the whole Chinese population.

“ We’ll go, then. Come on.” His tone was decided and left me no alternative.

“ Why are you so keen about this? ” I asked as we entered the first block of the quarter.

“ I gave you one reason,” he replied harshly, more harshly than he had ever spoken to me before, and I saw that his lips were drawn tight and his face was hard. For a few minutes we walked on in silence.

“ See here, Toby! ” He came to a sud-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

den halt and put his hand on my shoulder. “ I did not mean to be impatient. For the first time in my life I am in a revengeful mood. The main reason I have for coming here is to wipe out the insult offered to your companion. Suppose that she had been captured! ” A flash of pain crossed his face.

In and out through the narrow alleys we wound, one of them looking and smelling as much like another as it was possible for two things to look and smell. Blue-bloused coolies jostled us; precocious heathen youngsters jeered at us, and hidden females hissed shrilly from behind screened wickets.

“ I can not find it, Doctor, ” I admitted at length. “ I am beginning to fear that I should not know the place even should I come upon it. ”

“ Then we shall have to give it—

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

What?" This last in a hard whisper because I clutched his arm.

"There! There!" I breathed, pointing.

I had caught sight of a Chinaman who brushed by us from behind. It was the man of whom we were in search, and he had favored me with a glance from the tail of his eye.

"Did he know you?"

"Yes, I think he did."

If the Chinaman was aware that we were following him, he did not show it. He sauntered along, in an idle, gossipy fashion, stopping to talk and laugh with a countryman every little while; but his course tended ever in one general direction, toward one of the larger streets.

"Ugh, ugh!" Dr. Stone exclaimed in a rising voice. The Chinaman had suddenly disappeared.

"Where did he go?" I asked.

"Into this joss-house. It is the temple

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

of the Sam Yups; we might as well go in."

He led the way, and I followed wonderfully up two flights of marble stairs. At the first landing we found ourselves in a great square hall with doors on either side.

"The temple is on the floor above," he threw at me over his shoulder.

I stared around curiously when we reached the next floor. It was the first time I had been in a joss-house and there was much to admire.

"You can look at these some other time, Toby," said Dr. Stone, linking his arm in mine as he dropped a coin into the hands of the priest. "He is over there by the altar and I am going to have it out with him. No, we'll wait till he gets through bumping his head against the mat. Let me point out the beauties of this piece of allegorical carving."

We stopped before a great frieze of gilded camphor wood. The Doctor stood

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

at my left, explaining the meaning of the figures, but he kept in view the Chinaman at the altar.

“ We'll move down a little farther and have a look at the tapestry,” he said, edging toward the lower end of the room. Then he launched into a long, detailed account of the artistic worth of silk tapes-tries. I cast a swift glance toward the altar. The Chinaman was still there, down on his knees, his head rising and falling to an incantation.

“ In the ancient temples of the Middle Kingdom—” The conclusion of Dr. Stone's sentence was drowned in a volley of shrieks and screams, a regular bedlam of unintelligible sounds. Whirling simultaneously, we saw a thick bank of smoke roll into the room from the stairway.

“ The place is on fire,” I cried.

We made a break for the stairs. Up came another belch of smoke.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Come! You go this way! ” exclaimed a priest, seizing my shoulder.

I followed him, Dr. Stone coming close behind. The priest raised a window and, throwing his leg over the sill, began scrambling down the iron ladder. Almost as by magic, the court below was swarming with brown-skinned heathen.

Behind us were half a dozen Chinese. One, another priest, pushed me toward the window. The smoke drove toward us in a thick black volume. I started to follow the Chinaman down the fire-escape, but a hand twisted into my collar and I was drawn back again.

“ Don’t, Toby! Look below. It’s a job.”

“ It’s fire! ” I snarled.

“ It’s murder down there, ” he answered. “ Don’t you see that they are waiting for you like a pack of starved dogs? ”

He dragged me back. I looked down



“The smoke choked me and got into my eyes, but I hung to the queue”

Page 186

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DR. NICHOLAS STONE

below again. I think I caught a glint of metal. The faces had a savage look. A squall of unintelligible gibberish floated up.

“This way!” Dr. Stone pushed me toward the smoke. A Chinaman tried to get between us. It was our Chinaman. With one hand Dr. Stone made a reach for the fellow’s queue, with the other he seized an ancient battle-pike from the stand of arms at one side of the altar.

“Take this,” he said to me. I felt the braid of hair thrust into my hand. The next thing I saw clearly was that the sharp point of the heavy weapon on the end of the pole was between the Chinaman’s shoulders.

We three were now the only persons in the temple, all the others having gone out of the window. The smoke still poured up the stairway, but less thickly than before.

“Forward,” shouted Dr. Stone.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

The captive tried to turn. A prod between the shoulders convinced him that he was overpowered, and he threw me a black look. Just then I discovered that there was a slit in my vest, half its length; I reeled.

“ Hold tight! Go on,” commanded Dr. Stone. “ That’s where he struck you with the knife, but I had him too quick. He didn’t reach the skin.”

Into the thick smoke of the stairs we plunged. I noted that as yet we had seen no tongue of flame. The smoke choked me and got into my eyes, but I hung to the queue. Back of me, the long pike in his hand and the point of it ever against the captive’s back, came my companion. A struggling, swearing, breathless trio, we reached the bottom of the first stairs.

“ See! There is no fire!” Dr. Stone shouted.

In the center of the marble hall sat an

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

immense kettle; from this came the smoke.

“Down the next one with him,” came the command. Dutifully I plunged ahead. At once the air was clearer—the smoke not having come downward.

Half-way down the second flight, the captive turned his distorted, malignant face upon us. I stepped back, for I saw a gleam of the knife that he yet held in his hand. Dr. Stone pressed forward the pike, and when he drew it back blood dripped from the end of it. There was a quick, half-circling flash of steel in the air, something grazed my hand, the steady pull at the end of the coarse braid suddenly ceased and I fell over backward. I caught a glimpse of the Chinaman rolling down the few remaining steps, saw Dr. Stone lunge forward with the pike. The Chinaman bounded to his feet, and shot out of the door and into the street. In my hand was a short length of queue.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Let’s get out of here, Toby,” said the Doctor, leaning his weapon against the wall and assisting me to my feet. Then we strolled nonchalantly into the street.

“ Button up your coat, so the cut won’t show.”

“ Where did the Chinaman go? I thought you wanted revenge,” I said.

“ I don’t, Toby. I only thought I did,” he answered. “ When I had him on the end of that big knife I hadn’t the heart to run it through him. I would have turned him over to the police, but I could not spit him from behind. Let us get out of this part of town.”

CHAPTER XII

It was fifteen minutes before the appointed hour of nine when the supposed Herr Von Deitman and I took seats in my office. He looked as I supposed a German student should look and he appeared to lose himself in contemplation of his double-decked pipe bowl, while I with restless glance watched the second hand of my watch waltz 'round and 'round its little circle.

"Shipley's late," I remarked, when the minute hand finally pointed to the hour.

"I think not," the Doctor replied, as there came a knock at the door to give my doubts the lie. "Come!"

It was Mr. Shipley. No longer the rebellious, self-satisfied man of the other day; but a subdued, humble Mr. Shipley who filled the doorway and paused hesitatingly.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ You have learned a great many things, Mr. Shipley. “ Will you be kind enough to enter and summarize your discoveries? ” said Dr. Stone encouragingly.

Mr. Shipley twisted once or twice in his seat, and crossed and recrossed his stumpy legs not less than three times before he could find the proper words with which to begin his narrative.

“ It’s rather a long story, ” he began. “ I should like to know how you were so positive as to what I should learn. All right, some other time, sir, will do. I want to take back what I said about insanity and such things being outside a detective’s legitimate line of inquiry. Dr. Walton Baker’s private sanatorium, for the treatment of nervous and mental diseases, is, so far as I have been able to learn, a reputable institution, conducted under sanction of law and having the endorsement of the medical fraternity.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ I at first experienced considerable difficulty in devising a sufficient excuse for loitering about the grounds and thus making the acquaintance of the attendants. Needless to say, though, that I succeeded in my design. The nurse who had Mr. Martini in his care is a tall, cadaverous fellow of a melancholy disposition, who takes himself and the world very seriously. I found that he had a vivid recollection of everything concerning Edward Martini, and that a portion of his low spirits is directly attributable to the death of that young man. He holds himself guilty of culpable negligence in permitting Mr. Martini to take his life. He recounted the hallucinations of Martini so graphically that I shudder even now at the recollection.”

Indeed, Mr. Shipley did show the effect of recent, if not of present, stress.

“ The callers first, if you please, Mr. Shipley,” Dr. Stone interposed.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ There were a great many, sir. The young man had been well liked and his friends did not forget him. I have the names of a dozen here, and the addresses of some of them.” Handing Dr. Stone a sheet from his note-book, the detective continued:

“ You will note that the young man’s mother called often, about once a week. Sometimes he would receive her cordially; at other times he would turn from her in great fear. The expressions he gave utterance to at these times were most peculiar—but I anticipate. There was a young woman of whom he had thought a great deal. She could not reconcile herself to the change. There was, as you had suggested, Mr. Von Deitman, one person in particular whose regular coming he looked forward to with intense anxiety, and with whom he used often to spend hours in the grounds under the trees. An elderly man

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

of kind and sympathetic disposition, who had a quieting effect upon him, except at such times as he was beset by his curious hallucinations. This man's name, as you will see by my notes, was Forsythe——”

“ What? ” I was startled into exclaiming.

Dr. Stone's sharp look of reproach silenced further interruption on my part.

“ Do you know the gentleman? ” asked Mr. Shipley, turning to me.

“ Quite well, ” I answered, “ but pardon my interruption and continue. ”

“ Now for the history of the case itself. Mr. Martini's mental disturbance dated from one morning, when upon rising he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and discovered that he was an emerald green. Instantly everything else was green as well; he was in a green world. This lasted for two days, at the end of which time things resumed their normal colors

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

and he began to be easier in his mind. After one day's rest from these delusions they returned again with greater vividness than before.

“ Of course this thing made quite a stir among his friends. Mr. Martini was sent to Dr. Baker's sanatorium. He went voluntarily, in the hope that he might be cured. The first twenty-four hours in the sanatorium developed a change. The world gradually assumed its normal color, but Mr. Martini developed a strange and unaccountable irritability, together with an excessive flow of animal spirits.

“ There was a certain buoyancy about him, if I may be allowed the expression. Or, as the nurse said, ‘ he was on a razor-edge.’ The slam of a door, a jar of the building, or, even of the air, would cause him to spring from his chair, even from his bed. He began to feel the restraint of the place, to suffer from his cramped

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

ambition. He had an unconquerable desire to do something. He swore that he was recovered, that he was in better health than he had ever been before. Then all this changed abruptly. My friend, the nurse, went into the room one morning and young Martini screamed at him: 'Go! Go!' like a man in awful fear, and huddled in the bed and drew the clothes over his head. When the nurse took a step forward, Martini uncovered his head again, and raved, and cursed at the nurse, and implored him not to come nearer.

"Not to go too much into details, that lasted for two days. As I have told you, this nurse had always been the confidant of the young man. He learned from Martini that upon that particular morning he (the nurse) had assumed abnormal proportions; that he (Martini) had seemed to shrivel up, at least he felt that way; but that if he looked at his hand it became an

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

immense paw, as large as a door-mat; that the nurse had frightened him half to death; that he had appeared larger than any giant of fairy tales, and Martini feared that if this giant entered the room he might unintentionally crush him."

"I see—megalopsia," mused Dr. Stone under his breath.

"This was bad enough," continued Mr. Shipley, "for there was a recurrence of the hallucinations. Everything was magnified out of all proportion, and the poor man was in a piteous condition. At another time all this was reversed; everything became exceedingly small. Mind you, sir, Martini was on that razor-edge all the time. He wanted his mother to step on his hand, when she came, and was in excessive fear of injuring her because of her diminutive size. The house was not large enough for him to enter; the bed was too small for him to lie on; he shouted in

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

a loud voice for every one to get out of his way and was distressed by a fear that he would trample some one to death. Then, in a day or so, the hallucination was reversed again.

“ Mr. Forsythe seemed fortunate in coming always either when things appeared small to poor Martini, or during the short intervals when the young man seemed rational. His death occurred in an attempt to escape from a nurse who was acting as relief. In sheer terror the desperate madman cut his throat with a piece of window-glass. That is all that I have to report.”

“ And does all this prove anything? ” I asked, the moment we were alone.

“ Positive proof, Toby, that young Martini was, as I said to you in the first place, hounded to his death. A false insanity was created by means of drugs. First, the young man saw things green; this was sufficient to get him into the asylum. It

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

proves to me conclusively the administration of a drug called santonin. That razor-edge feeling was the result of strychnine, and the hallucinations were the result of canabis indica or hasheesh. It is the first time I have ever known hallucinations as to relative sizes to alternate; it is generally either one or the other. They are both unusual and little known effects of the drug. The continued administration of the strychnine combined with the hallucinations was sufficient to drive any man to his death."

"But who gave these drugs? How was their use continued under such adverse circumstances?"

"That's for your detectives to learn, Toby. I shall tell them how they are to learn it."

"Then the cords are beginning to tighten!" I exclaimed. Before Dr. Stone could answer, Mr. McBride was shown in.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ I have here a full and complete report of all that my instructions covered,” the little Scotchman began, plunging directly into his subject. “ There is hardly any variation in the narratives of the several guests present in the home of Mr. La Rue upon the night of his death. I had some trouble in getting started right, but after that everything was clear sailing. The guests, as you stated, were four in number. I obtained the names from Mrs. La Rue herself, who is at present stopping at a family hotel here in the city. I obtained practically no other information from her, as she was in another part of the house at the time her husband died. Mr. Ben Cole, one of the guests, gave a remarkably full and clear account. Perhaps I had better read you what he said.”

Dr. Stone nodded.

“ We were gathered at La Rue’s informally, with the object of helping him kill a

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

week's time. There were present Winston Clark, Charlie Goodwin, Mr. Forsythe, and myself."

I tried to catch Dr. Stone's eye when Mr. Forsythe's name was mentioned, but he refused to see my signal. Mr. McBride continued:

"Herman La Rue had never seemed in better health and spirits; he kept us on the go all the while. It was either a tramp across the hills, or a day on the links; always something. The three of us younger fellows had all we could do to keep up with the rapid pace he set us. Forsythe was quite out of it, though occasionally he would put in half an hour on the road. The old gentleman showed up to rather better advantage in the evening entertainments, for he could do quite a number of very creditable tricks at parlor-magic, and had no end of good stories.

"Winston Clark was the billiard sharp of the crowd. There was hardly anything

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Winnie could not do with a cue. Well, we were having a first-rate time of it that Tuesday night that Herman dropped off so suddenly. Every detail is as firmly fixed in my mind as though it was only last night that it all occurred. We were sitting around the dinner-table—Mrs. La Rue had excused herself and left us in possession—when old man Forsythe, toying with his little thimbleful of chartreuse, rose and, holding his glass to the light, praised the fine old cordial. He hadn't been drinking much, none of us had; we'd had only the one course of wine, the fine brand of sauterne that Herman thought so much of, but it had warmed the old man's heart enough to make his tongue wag fire.

“Talk!—Well, he did talk. Such a string of fine poetic nonsense about the old Abbey of Chartreuse, and the monks who had made the cordial, and so forth. He ended in a burst of spontaneous applause from us all. Then, still standing, beaming over his gold-rimmed glasses at the bit of cordial, he said that he would

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

show us something that we had never seen before. At that he tilted the glass and drank all but the last few drops of the liqueur. Then he turned to the sideboard —there was every conceivable liqueur and cordial in its lower part—and, arranging the bottles on the table before him, he filled his glass again, and drank off all but a thin layer of the second cordial, and now there were two in the glass—a little of each, but sharply separated.

“ Ten times did he repeat this, each time leaving a little of the last one added. When he poured in from the tenth bottle, the glass was full, a rainbow of colors, each one of them sharply defined from its fellows. It was such skilful little things as this that made Forsythe always in demand. Winnie Clark took it as a challenge. He fell to bragging of his billiards, and the shots he could make. Then he offered a handicap to any man in the room. Herman snapped him up. It was a pretty exciting game. I can see Herman La Rue now, as he would stand off and bite his nails, while

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

waiting his turn to play. Nervous? That man was so fidgety that he'd nibble at the tip of his cue and bite off little pieces of chalk.

“ We were all watching Clark make an unusually difficult masse shot, when, all of a sudden, Herman gave a gulp for air, his cue rattled to the floor and he reeled backward against the wall, then sank in a heap on the floor. Of course we didn't think it was anything serious. How could we? Some one tore his collar off. I threw open the windows and hustled around and got in the way generally. Old man Forsythe was the coolest of the lot. He tried to give La Rue a little whisky; ordered black coffee; and hurried some one for a doctor. That's about all. It was more than an hour before the doctor came. Poor Herman was past all help.”

“ This is practically all that Mr. Cole could tell me, sir,” said Mr. McBride, pausing.

“ And the others? ” asked Dr. Stone.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ What they had to relate does not materially differ from what Mr. Cole said. Some think that Mr. La Rue was dead before he reached the floor, and others that the end was not so abrupt. You asked me to find out about the chalk. There was a new supply procured, but that was before any of the party arrived. As for any guest having been seen to put a piece in his pocket, I learned nothing to that effect. However, Mr. Forsythe did do sleight-of-hand tricks with the cubes occasionally.”

“ I must compliment you, Mr. McBride, upon having made so thorough and careful an investigation in so short a time,” said Dr. Stone approvingly.

The little Scotchman beamed his acknowledgment of the praise. “ If you expect to prove anything from what I have learned, sir, I am afraid that you have rather an unsubstantial foundation,” he said, modestly.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“Then you would draw no conclusions?”

“I have to confess that I see nothing out of the way. If it was a case of ——” Mr. McBride hesitated.

“Of what?” the Doctor queried.

“Of poisoning. I presume that is what you have in mind. Who in that house was to benefit? I have even gone so far as to prove, to my own satisfaction, that no one in the house, either as guest or domestic, was acquainted with the assignee in the case. And even the assignee gained nothing, for the policy was in security of value received.”

“Are you positive about your last assertion, Mr. McBride?” asked Dr. Stone.

The Scotchman did not answer at once. He stared intently into Dr. Stone’s eyes, as though searching for a hidden meaning.

“No, I am not,” he said at length. “I slipped there. I took it for granted.”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Then there is only one thing more for you to learn, Mr. McBride—the circumstances under which the assignment was made.”

The detective silently withdrew.

“ About Forsythe——” I began anxiously. “ You can’t think——? ”

“ That he’s the murderer? The man with the crooked mind? ” Dr. Stone completed.

“ Yes.”

“ Can you suspect such a thing, Toby? ”

“ Frankly, I can’t,” I answered. “ But yet——”

“ Then you are at liberty to watch the game and draw your own conclusions,” he answered.

“ I know that the net is drawing tight about some one,” I replied.

“ Two more to report yet, Toby. Better stay and hear all there is to hear,” he said as I walked over toward the door.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“They are both in the office, waiting,” I answered, returning to my seat.

“Then have in Mr. Ives, the man who has been looking up Garthwait’s career. It won’t be twenty-four hours till we have the case complete.”

It began to appear to me, also, in the same light, after I had listened to Mr. Ives’s report. He proved conclusively that the Vice-President of the Shasta County Copper Company, etc., had traveled under a number of names that were not his own. As the substance of his report merely proved Dr. Stone’s statements, I will not set it down here.

“Wonderful!” I exclaimed, when we were once more alone. “It is as though you had a sixth sense which enables you to see into the past.”

“No, not quite so wonderful as that, Toby,” the Doctor replied, not, I imagined, without a little satisfaction at my

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

warmly expressed admiration. "Part of what I laid down as instructions for your men was merely an application of scientific logic; other parts were the result of my ability to reconstruct the actions of the criminals. It would not be strange, however, had I been more at fault than I was, considering that I have had to measure my mind against that of a monomaniac. And now we will hear the report of the man who shadowed Garthwait."

The inspector, Burton was his name, had a crestfallen air when he entered which was evident even to me.

"Well, Mr. Burton," said the Doctor, after a quick glance at the man, "your part of the program has not turned out well. It was all right for the first day, but on the second Mr. Garthwait discovered that you were following him, and, walking up to you, demanded to know the reason why."



"His cue rattled to the floor and he reeled backward",

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Mr. Burton looked his surprise. "I—I tried to repair the error by sending Mr. Cordes in my—" he broke off sharply. "How do you know all this?" he demanded.

"Your countenance tells it plainly enough; but, no matter. So long as the man does not get away it will be sufficient for the present. If you had an opportunity, do you think that you could retrieve yourself to-day?"

"I hope so, sir," Mr. Burton answered eagerly.

"Very well, we shall see. Heretofore you have been working in the dark. I am going to tell you more than has been told any one of your associates."

Mr. Burton leaned forward in an attitude of strained attention, while Dr. Stone related to him as much of the outline of Garthwait's connection with the different cases as he thought wise.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Now, Mr. Burton,” the Doctor continued, “ this man has somewhere a memorandum of the amounts of money he has received from this company, together with the names of the victims. I want that memorandum.”

“ I will find it,” said the detective with determination. He rose, as though to go.

“ Where will you look, Mr. Burton? ” asked Dr. Stone softly.

“ I shall look through his rooms in the hotel. I shall, while he is away, search all of his possessions. I think that I have at least learned how to find a hidden paper.”

“ Quite useless. Let me tell you what you are to look for. You will probably find an old diary tossed in one corner of a bureau drawer. The entries will be commonplace, but the book will contain the secret. I think,” very slowly, “ that we shall have to read between the lines, where we shall find what we seek written in sym-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

pathetic ink. If there is a letter lying in some conspicuous place, it may be that that is what we need. You will report here at eight o'clock to-night."

We were to have but little time to ourselves, for the office boy entered and handed me a letter. It read:

"Won't you please keep me informed as to what progress you are making? I think that I have a right to say that I have not been treated fairly. Have you learned anything concerning Dr. Stone?"

"Juanita Ybarra."

I handed the note to Dr. Stone without comment.

"I'll go myself, Toby," he said. "It is only right that I should. Be here this evening when Burton returns."

CHAPTER XIII

It is not surprising that I was at the office somewhat before the appointed time. I was possessed of the feeling that something was about to happen. In the past two days events had piled one upon another with such appalling rapidity that it seemed they must continue to do so. Full as this day had been of revelations, more were yet to come. There still remained Mr. Burton's investigation to be heard from. But it was not this alone that made me anxious, even nervous. There was a certain vague, indefinable something—call it premonition or what you will—something there was that set my blood afire and whipped my heart to a more rapid action.

Hardly had I switched on the lights when Dr. Stone entered, close upon my heels.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ You are early,” I said.

“ Yes, there is nothing to do but wait.”

“ And Miss Ybarra?” I asked, after a considerable pause.

“ It’s rather a long story, Toby, and I’ll tell it you some other time.”

His face wore a strange contented expression, and I forbore to question further.

Eight o’clock came, and no Mr. Burton; nine, and he had not yet put in an appearance. I grew more uneasy; Dr. Stone seemed lost in reverie and disinclined to carry on conversation. There we sat. He calm, silent, with eyes half-closed, seemingly forgetful of both past and present and dreaming of the future, I with my nerves like a tense fiddle-string. The inevitable happened; though he said hardly a word to me, I was calmed despite myself. The string slacked as surely as though he had laid his hand to the key of the instrument and eased its strain.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

It was near ten before there came a rap at the door, followed by the appearance of the inspector.

“ Mr. Garthwait was in the hotel until a short time ago, and I have had no—”

“ Yes, yes,” Dr. Stone interrupted, casting his reveries aside and at once all alert, “ and you were unsuccessful.”

“ There was not a piece of paper of any kind in the room,” answered Mr. Burton positively.

“ Are you certain? ” asked the Doctor incredulously.

“ I am.”

“ Pshaw, Mr. Burton, there must be. I can’t be wrong,” said Dr. Stone. “ Have you a key to the room? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then I shall have a look myself. Let us go at once.”

The detective was about to interpose an

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

objection, but he was silenced by a wave of the hand.

“ Come on, Toby. It makes no difference if Garthwait does come while we are in his room. The case is complete and he might as well be apprehended.”

A cold, wet wind was blowing and I drew the collar of my coat tight about my neck. As we had not far to go, we walked.

The descent of the three of us upon Mr. Garthwait’s rooms was so open, the detective inserted his key so brazenly, that the incident was unnoticed.

In the center of the room was a little table that had done duty as a desk. Everything upon it was in order, and on one corner of it was one of the small desk calendars sent out by some business houses.

“ That’s it! ” Dr. Stone pointed to the calendar. “ I’m afraid that you’ll never rise in the world, Mr. Burton.”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ I see nothing,” the inspector answered surlily.

“ If you look, you will.” Dr. Stone picked up the calendar, twisted the upper leaf 'round the globe of an incandescent light and held it there. “ It may be that it's not a heat-ink,” he mused. Then he tried the next page. “ Ah; I thought so! ” in a satisfied tone.

Faint blue marks began to appear on the surface of the white paper; in a few seconds more they were quite distinct.

Mr. Burton swore softly.

“ It's a cryptogram,” said the Doctor, “ but that makes no difference. It can be deciphered in the morning.” He dropped the calendar into his pocket. We walked boldly from the room and made our way to the street again.

“ Ugh, but it's nasty out here! ” I complained. The wind was very penetrating.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Yes. What’s that boy crying his ‘ Extra ’ about? ”

“ Yuxtra! Yuxtra! All about the suicide of Banker Van Court! ” called the boy, running toward us.

“ What is it? ” asked Dr. Stone as I clutched him by the arm.

“ Van Court! Don’t you know? He’s one of our big policy-holders! Here, boy, give me two papers! ”

My hand shook with excitement as I seized the papers from the newsboy.

“ Come! Come! Let’s see what it says! ” I shouted, hurrying toward the shelter of the hotel doorway, half dragging the Doctor after me. “ Here! Here’s one of the papers. Read it while I read the other. Take it, take it! ” I exclaimed, thrusting the paper into his hands. “ Why, man, don’t you understand? Banker Van Court has committed suicide! It must be another murder! ”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“Wait a moment, Toby,” he answered calmly. “This isn’t the time to get excited.” He glanced over his paper rapidly. Before I had much more than got beyond the headlines he had finished it and thrust the sheet into his pocket.

“Was Van Court one of your policy-holders?” he asked.

“Yes, yes!” I answered, “he had a ten-year endowment for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars.”

“Policy wasn’t assigned, was it?”

“No. But—”

“Come! We’ll go to the office,” he said. “It’s only three blocks from here.”

“Mr. Burton,” Dr. Stone turned upon the detective, “you are to stay here. Your duty is to take Mr. Garthwait into custody when he returns.”

I fell into step at the Doctor’s side, and we bent our heads to the cutting wind.

“It appears,” said the Doctor, “that

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Mr. Van Court of San Jose has been staying on an ark at a place called Greenbrae, and that he committed suicide by shooting himself in the head with a pistol. That is all that is known at present. Van Court is a man so well known, both here and in his home city, that the enterprising evening paper deemed the matter of sufficient interest to call for an extra."

When we reached the office I threw myself wearily into a chair. "What is to be done? The paper says it is suicide. Do you think it is?" I demanded.

"Toby, it can't be suicide. You say that Van Court's policy has not been assigned. Very well, then it must be tied up in some other way. But it may be a case of suicide. I can't say for a certainty until I know the particulars of his death. Now that I have promised you to see this thing through, I intend doing so. Where is Greenbrae? How soon can I get there?"

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ It’s a little station on the north—” I hesitated.

“ Well! ”

“ Why, that’s where Forsythe went to spend a few days on *his* ark,” I whispered hoarsely. “ Forsythe! Forsythe, again! ”

“ You were saying that Greenbrae is a little station on the north—” he prompted.

“ North side of the bay,” I completed. “ But you can’t get there to-night. The last boat left at half after eleven, and it’s now twelve o’clock. You’ll have to wait until seven in the morning.”

He considered a moment, tapping the edge of the desk lightly with his fingers.

“ That won’t do Toby. I must get there to-night,” he answered finally.

“ But you can’t do it. It’s impossible,” I answered.

The word “ can’t ” seemed to grate on

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

him. His voice was hard when he spoke again.

“ *I am going!* Come, Wilkinson, hurry now. Charter me a tug, by ‘phone. I’ll pay for it myself.”

I knew that I would not permit that; but I said nothing, for I grasped his idea and saw that time was an important factor.

One after another I rang up the four tug lines. From not one of them could I procure a boat. Upon the last refusal I turned to Dr. Stone with—,

“ Well, what now? It’s hopeless. We’ll have to give it up.”

“ Wilkinson! ” sharply, “ we’ll give it up when we have to! We can get some sort of a boat at the water front.”

“ But the weather, Doctor, the weather! If it’s blowing like this here, what is it like on the bay? ”

“ Bother the weather,” said he. Turning from me, he rang for a cab.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

A few minutes later I found myself on the sidewalk, hustled from there into a cab and bouncing over the cobbles. I was flurried, and hot and cold by flashes, but my companion seemed not in the least excited.

Bounce, thump, slide, then bounce again, and the cab had only the ordinary metal tires. It would have been impossible to talk even had we tried; so there was nothing to do but sit tight and swing to the strap. Finally there came the rattle of hoofs on wood, the smooth running of the wheels, and we were at the water front. I followed Dr. Stone as he sprang from the cab and walked out on the wharf. The watchman came toward us threateningly.

“ I want to get a tug or a launch,” said Dr. Stone addressing him.

The watchman shook some of the rain off his coat, adjusted his pipe to a comfortable angle, and after sundry other preparatory maneuvers made ready to speak.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Funny thing,” he drawled with provoking slowness. “ Everybody wants a tug or a launch, or anything that’ll go to-night, seems to me. Think you’ve missed your last chance, mister.”

“ How so? ” asked the Doctor, the faintest suspicion of discouragement and weariness creeping into his voice.

“ They was two or three young fellers skirmishin’ ‘round here lookin’ fer a boat, every one of ‘em plumb crazy, an’ runnin’ everywhere. See them lights comin’ ‘round the end o’ the wharf there? ” he answered, pointing. “ That’s them, now. They got Cap’n Nelson’s boat; on’y one to be got.”

The irregular exhaust from an asthmatic gasolene engine came distinctly to our ears as a twenty-five-foot boat swept by.

“ Who are they? Where are they going in such a hurry? ” I burst out.

The man took his own time about an-

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

swering. "Reporters fer a mornin' paper. Goin' up toward San Quentin somewheres. Place called Greenbrae, I think."

"Toby," Dr. Stone turned on his heel, "we won't give it up yet awhile. If there was one launch on the water front, there is another. If those reporters reach the scene before we do, we'll learn nothing."

Ah, but it was a discouraging half hour we put in searching for a boat. Wet, chilled, disheartened, I followed Dr. Stone from one place to another. His energy was exhaustless; his hope and confidence indomitable, and yet he could not have been less wet or chilled than I. Finally, however, we found a launch. The owner refused to go with us and we were compelled to buy the boat outright. There was some trouble about accepting a check; but at length all the difficulties were overcome.

"'Member you go to the south of Angel

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Island and 'round Tiburon Point,'" howled the former owner, as Dr. Stone cast off. "Out-goin' tide. Mud-flats all charted."

Dr. Stone pulled the lever, the fly-wheel turned over, and the Nancy turned her nose from shore.

"Draws on'y two feet," shouted the man on shore.

Out around the point of the wharf we went. The Doctor threw the lever over to full speed, and we had the first straight run of six miles before us. I pressed my face against the glass. To the right was the great spread of silence and the water, out of which, now and then, loomed darkly some giant world-wanderer. To the left was the jagged line of wharves and docks, dotted with lights. Save these things, there was nothing but the wind and the drizzle and the night.

With his hand on the wheel, with the front window let partly down and the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

moisture driving in upon his face, Dr. Stone stared ahead, except when occasionally he dropped his glance to the compass and the chart.

I huddled as close to the engine as I could and tried to absorb what little comfort came from so poor a heating device as a gasolene engine.

“Rough!” said the Doctor, over his shoulder.

“Yes. See anything of the reporters’ boat?” I replied.

“No, not yet.”

I went forward and tried to peer through the thick gloom. There was nothing to be seen.

“They have a slower boat than ours,” he said encouragingly.

“But more than a half-hour’s start,” I answered, also encouragingly, and hugged the engine again.

Regardless of the continuous pitch and

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

roll of the boat, which every moment became greater, I had just dropped into a half doze when, with a sudden leap, like an angered horse at the touch of steel, the boat threw her head into the air and whirled sharply 'round. The wind, in a sudden access of fury, roared deafeningly. Before I could appreciate what was happening, the little boat was thrown into the trough of the sea, a great wave beat against its side, shattered the glass and poured in a torrent of water.

I saw a mountainous wave coming at our side, threatening to beat us down. There stood Stone, feet braced wide, tugging at the wheel. I splashed forward to help him. Before I could gain his side I saw him throw his whole weight to the wheel, and, so it seemed to me, he lifted the boat out of the trough and turned her head-on. We balanced a moment on the crest, then slid down into the hollow.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Even meeting the billows so was bad enough, but, with the wind and the tide against her, the Nancy was not holding her own; she was driving, stern first, out to sea.

I looked at Stone's face; it was hard, determined. He darted a glance at me. There was no need for words.

Slowly, foot by foot, the boat swept outward; wind and tide were both against us. Things looked bad.

"Throw out some water," he shouted.

There was not enough water in the boat to endanger us, but if more came—— I threw off my coat and set to work.

Never once did I take my eyes entirely off Dr. Stone. He held firmly to the wheel, though time and again I feared that the spokes would be torn from his grasp. When I had bailed out the water I went close to him again.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ We'll make it,” he said with a grim smile.

I saw then that, although we were still drifting out, the Nancy's head was turned a little crosswise to the sea. Slowly, with infinite tedium we fought our way to the lee of the shore. Here we had only the tide to fight, but that contested the way, for we were in a narrow strait with a great volume of water back of it.

“ Tiburon Point,” said Dr. Stone, indicating a group of lights on the left.

I drew a long breath of satisfaction. We had won that much at least, and the worst of the storm was behind and to one side.

“ What's that? ” I exclaimed, peering over the Doctor's shoulder.

“ A light. It's the reporters' boat.”

“ Then we'll make it ahead of them yet,” I shouted.

Each minute brought us nearer to the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

bobbing lights ahead. Presently we found ourselves opposite the other boat and not a hundred yards distant. It was at this moment that they discovered and hailed us, asking our destination.

“Greenbrae,” answered my companion unhesitatingly.

Slowly we forged ahead, Dr. Stone studying his chart closely all the while. We had now less than three miles to cover.

“We’ll get there first,” I said for the second time.

“Yes, and they’ll be there not less than ten minutes later, unless——” He fell to studying the chart again. Then he turned and looked for a long time at the other boat.

“A good many mud-flats about here,” he remarked, a curious note sounding in his voice.

We were leaving the other boat rapidly astern. Doctor Stone decreased our speed,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

and we watched the red and green lights draw up with us.

Though there was still some wind it had ceased raining; the clouds had cleared away and the moon gave sufficient light to make out the landmarks. The chart showed us to be in a way about two miles in width, and also that over near the north side the water was deep, and that toward the south it shoaled. Half a mile in front, as indicated, stretched a finger-like shoal which at low tide was completely covered with water, ranging in depth from four feet to one and a half feet near the shore. To avoid it would require a considerable detour.

The other boat was near now, but keeping toward the deeper water.

“Know where the channel is?” a voice hailed from the newspaper boat.

“Yes,” answered Dr. Stone.

“All right, go ahead.”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

The course of the other boat was altered to follow that of the Nancy, from which I judged that they had no chart and knew their direction only in a general way. Our speed was increased until we had lengthened the distance between the boats to about six hundred feet. Then I saw that the Nancy was headed directly for the submerged point.

The tide was nearly at its ebb. The Doctor kept studying the shore closely and turning from that to the chart. Of a sudden there came to my ears a peculiar sound. It was instantly drowned by the noise of voices in angry discussion. I looked back. The reporters' boat had come to a dead stop.

“Now I see,” I exclaimed.

“I’m sorry I had to do that, Toby. The boys can’t cover their detail now. They’ll get off all right when the tide comes in, though.”

CHAPTER XIV

With the newspaper boat hard and fast in the mud and the cries of the reporters ringing less distinctly in our ears, the Nancy shot ahead at full speed. Half a mile distant we made out the dark outline of the railroad bridge marking our destination.

We swept up to the line of arks. Some of them floated freely in the water, some were quite out of it and rested on the mud. In one that was clear of the mud there burned a light.

“It must be that,” I whispered.

The Doctor nodded.

Our boat bumped lightly against the ark, and Dr. Stone sprang aboard it and made fast. We had made some little noise, and I expected to see the door open, if there was any one within, but it remained closed.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ We'll look in the window first,” said the Doctor, and we slipped quietly 'round the side.

A tight, tidy little room, made for comfort and cheer, was what we saw. On its walls were guns and tackle and souvenirs. All this I took in at a glance, but it was something upon the floor which caught my attention, and held it—a long, white, irregular object. I needed no one to tell me that it was a human form hidden by a sheet. I knew at once that it was the inanimate body of Mr. Van Court. With the knowledge came uncomfortable little shudders that played up and down my spine. By a supreme effort I forced my eyes to inspect the room. Over near one corner, huddled forward in a rocking-chair, sat a man with his face buried in his hands. The attitude was that of deep dejection. Now and then he rocked his chair in a jerky way,

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

then for a long time he would sit perfectly still.

“ Do—do you see? ” I gasped, clutching at Dr. Stone for support. “ It’s Forsythe! ”

“ Well! What of it? ” he whispered back. “ We might as well go in.”

Our rap upon the door may not have been unnecessarily loud, but to me it sounded like hammering. I waited with strained senses for the opening of the door. There came a sound of dragging, shuffling steps crossing the floor, the door flew open and a flood of light burst through, while, sharply outlined, there stood in the opening, Mr. Forsythe.

“ You here, Wilkinson! ” the old gentleman exclaimed, starting back but almost immediately recovering himself. “ Come in, ” he said. He looked from one to the other of us with undisguised surprise. I was at a loss what to say. Before the

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

pause could become awkward, Dr. Stone came to the fore.

“Mr. Forsythe, I believe?” he said in his pleasant way, with just that little touch of foreign accent. The old gentleman bowed, and Dr. Stone continued: “Mr. Wilkinson has asked me to come here with him, to inquire into the unfortunate accident that has deprived Mr. Van Court of his life.”

Mr. Forsythe stared at us in a blank way. He opened his mouth once or twice as though to speak, but his voice seemed to fail him. Then he moistened his lips and tried again.

“Unfortunate—unfortunate,” he murmured. Then, seeming to gain a little more command of himself, “It’s awful, sir, awful! I can hardly make up my mind that this thing has really happened to poor Van Court.” He appeared to be on the point of breaking down. “But, I

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

forget—please don't stand.” He waved his hand wearily toward two chairs.

“He, Van Court, was insured in our company,” I commenced, hesitatingly. “I didn't know that he was here on your ark. Duty—” And then I floundered and lost myself completely.

“It was suicide?” Dr. Stone completed for me.

“Yes—yes, suicide. It was poor Van Court's fate.” Mr. Forsythe's voice trembled. It was evident that he found it difficult to converse upon the matter calmly. His kindly face bore the trace of recent tears, and his eyes were troubled and pitiful. There was something touchingly winning in his air of childlike helplessness. “Poor Van Court! To think that he should do this while staying here with me.” He huddled forward in his rocking-chair again and covered his face.

Dr. Stone stepped softly to the middle

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

of the room and turned down a portion of the sheet. I tried to look away, but could not. I stared at the uncovered face on the floor, with the great hole in the forehead and the open eyes that glared at me. Dr. Stone beckoned me to come toward him; with protesting soul I obeyed. The form on the floor was nude, but it was not this to which he directed my attention. He silently indicated that I should look at the eyes. Their appearance was most unusual; the pupils were so large that only the faintest rim of iris showed. I turned away and dropped into my seat again.

“ Will you please make an effort to state what you know about this affair? ” the Doctor said encouragingly.

“ Poor Van, poor Van! ” Mr. Forsythe rested his chin dejectedly on his hand. “ He must have just stepped from his bath. It was the result of his dreadful madness and fear.”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ His madness! ” I could not help exclaiming.

“ Yes, I knew it would come to this. I have long felt that there would be just such an end.” Mr. Forsythe braced himself for the recital. “ Every one who knew Mr. Van Court was aware of his great fear that he would lose his mind—it was in the family. Many a time have I heard him say that at the first indication of approaching insanity he would take his life. And now he has kept his word. It was horrible fear he felt; it made him morbid. Oh! ” with a despairing cry, “ if I had only been here I might have prevented all this. But I wasn’t here. I wasn’t here.” And again Mr. Forsythe relapsed into silence.

“ When you came back you found him— ” Dr. Stone prompted, after a long wait.

“ Just as he is now, just as he is now. Oh, God, it was awful! To go away for

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

an afternoon's ramble, leaving your friend, your guest, happy and contented, and to come back and find him cold, dead. You are young men," looking up, "but when you have grown old, you will know how awful a thing it is to lose a friend." Mr. Forsythe's voice choked with emotion. " Yet I have seen my friends die around me one by one. Almost it gives me the superstitious feeling that my friendship for a man is an evil blight—an evil blight," he repeated, brokenly, with a convulsive, groaning sob.

I could not restrain the triumphant glance I threw at Dr. Stone. Whoever else might be guilty of crime, Mr. Forsythe at least had proven his own innocence and lack of complicity.

Grief, great sorrow is a thing that can not be so simulated as to appear real; and this was genuine, despairing, awful grief. So acutely did I feel my sympathy go out

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

toward this old man, that I should have slipped away, had it been possible. I wondered that Dr. Stone could sit so unmoved.

“ Gentlemen,” said Mr. Forsythe, abruptly, “ you’ll have to overlook this. I’m getting to be an old man. What can I do to help you. I appreciate the fact that, even though there can be but one opinion regarding this affair, you must make certain formal inquiries.”

“ Only formal, to be sure,” said Dr. Stone. “ Now, Mr. Forsythe, of course you consider that there is no doubt that this wound was self-inflicted? No, of course not. These questions are necessary, you know. The whole tragedy is evident; everything is plain on the face of it. There is the history of Mr. Van Court’s morbid fear; he was alone, the revolver hung here upon the wall, together with the shotgun and other weapons.”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Yes, yes, that’s it. Oh, if I had only been here! ” exclaimed Mr. Forsythe, self-accusingly.

“ Of course the wound was self-inflicted, ” Dr. Stone continued. “ Its direction and the powder marks prove that. Would you like to listen to an interesting story I have to tell, gentlemen? ”

“ This is hardly a fitting occasion, ” Mr. Forsythe replied, after a quick glance at the Doctor.

I was silent.

“ That remains to be seen. I think that the conclusions to be drawn from it are not inapplicable to the case of the unfortunate Mr. Van Court. ”

Dr. Stone’s voice took on something of the old familiar drawl, the blue eyes had a far-away look, and he settled himself in a comfortable position. Mr. Forsythe drooped in his chair, as though listening

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

through necessity to something that could not interest him.

“ There was one time a man,” he began, “ who, having gathered unto himself sufficient of the world’s goods that he might live in comfort, retired from the strife of business life. This man found, in the course of time, that hours hung heavy on his hands. Social pleasures tired him. He missed the strife and contention of the world that he had given up. He felt his wits grow rusty and his mind go stale, and life seemed not worth the living if he be compelled to pass it so. As the captive gull pines for the freedom of the salt sea air, as the penned antelope yearns for the stretch of plain, as the stabled charger chafes at his restraint from the scene of battle, so felt this man now that his fine, active mind had nothing to clash against, nothing to try its edge.

“ As time wore on and he felt himself

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

ever turn within himself to create an artificial obstacle to overcome, for the pleasure of overcoming, he began to feel a strange, new thought disturb his mind, and it was a thought he did not care to harbor. Often as he put it from him, it came again. There was this about the thought to recommend it; it was new. If he should only permit himself to entertain it, there would open a vast arena of mental conflict. He was beset, oppressed, pursued by the thought. Now this man was an estimable person; his position in society was assured, and no unworthy thing had ever been said against his good name.

“ The thought which came to this man, and persisted in recurring, was none less than that he might commit crime, even murder, without detection. That is, I mean to say, he could imagine himself committing crimes; fancy himself eluding the law.”

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Dr. Stone paused, apparently as though to arrange his facts. I looked from one to the other of the men. The Doctor's face was not hard; it was rather sad, and yet, withal, a little eager. Mr. Forsythe had roused himself from his lethargy, and wore an expression of incredulous wonder.

"Well?" said Mr. Forsythe, after the pause had been long sustained.

"Finally this man ceased to put the great thought from him. He entertained it. Purely in the abstract, remember; the carrying out of imaginary murders fascinated him; it became the great game of his life. The man was already much past the prime of life; but this did not prevent him from devoting himself to study. In time he became proficient in the knowledge of many drugs, and an expert in every kind of murder that might defy detection."

"What has your story to do with Van Court?" broke in Mr. Forsythe mildly.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

Dr. Stone, overlooking the interruption, continued: "In the course of time, practice must necessarily follow theory. That which had once possessed exciting features, ceased longer to possess them. The daring murder which occurred only in the mind of the assassin, no matter how skilfully conceived, carried with it no danger. After all there was no one to thwart but himself, and the game grew stale; it became even less satisfying than playing chess with oneself for antagonist. It was impossible, when assuming the part of opponent, to be rid of the privileged information of the perpetrator of the deed.

"Upon a certain occasion, it matters not where or when, the man made the acquaintance of another man, and confided in him. Garthwait was the name of the second man."

Mr. Forsythe started just a little, and fixed his eyes upon those of the narrator.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ The man who had conceived the idea of committing murder scientifically, had an opportunity, or rather was encouraged to play the game in earnest. The game in earnest, mind you, think of that! Was it not glorious! A real antagonist! No more play at the game, like an overgrown child. Now wit against wit, mind against mind; a lot of bungling fools, and the pleasure of watching their folly. Mr. Garthwait pointed out an instance in which he said that it seemed to him there were unsurmountable difficulties. This fired the vanity of the nameless man, and lo—the person died.

“ The thing was done. Now it was the game in earnest. It matters not that Garthwait profited; the murderer did not care, it was the game, and the game alone that he played for.”

“ But what of all this, and why tell it now? ” asked Mr. Forsythe, staring

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

straight at the Doctor's eyes. "The thought is well conceived, but this is not the time nor the place for its telling. I would rather spend my time in thoughts fitting the occasion."

"Have patience, Mr. Forsythe, and I'll come to a close," answered the Doctor softly. "Martini died; La Rue died; Mrs. Ybarra died. All friends of the murderer, and people whom he really loved. But Garthwait had said that they could not be killed without detection, and the murderer was bound to prove that there was no limit to his cunning."

Mr. Forsythe half rose in his seat, as though to expostulate. "I—I don't understand," he murmured. Then, vehemently—"Murdered! Murdered, you say! It's a lie! They were none of them murdered! I knew them all. These were my friends, and I knew them well!" His face went a pasty white.



“ ‘ He died, in fact, so soon as he put that cigar into his mouth ’ ”

Page 251

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ There came a time, though,” Dr. Stone continued, heedless of the interruption, “ when he found, or suspected, that another mind crossed the path of his own, a certain doctor by the name of Stone. This was the first time in the game that opposition, or even suspicion, had ever been roused. But it was only a little thing. The abortive effort of the small mind to pit itself against a greater one, and for a while the creator of the great game watched the struggles of his captive, only to see him at length give way to madness. Not less skilfully than others was the doctor put out of the way; all for the sake of the game.”

I turned my eyes on Mr. Forsythe again. He was fumbling in his pocket, and presently brought forth a cigar case and fingered it nervously.

“ Have one? ” he asked, passing the case to Dr. Stone.

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

“ Thank you, I’ll smoke it presently.” The Doctor removed one of the two cigars and thrust it into his pocket. I declined the other and Mr. Forsythe, biting off its end, put the cigar into his mouth, but forgot to light it. He leaned well back in his chair and, letting his head hang forward a little, closed his eyes to listen. .

Dr. Stone continued: “ The murderer, for so he even called himself now, had a friend visiting him on the ark — and this friend had a morbid fear of insanity. Would it not be an artistic touch to use this weakness; turn it against the man? ” Mr. Forsythe did not answer. He sat quietly with eyes closed and head hung forward and listened. “ The thing was simple enough. A little belladonna in the water of the bath. The heated water brought the blood to the surface; the stuff was whipped into the circulation, and in half a moment Van Court saw things all

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

blurred before him. His throat went dry, his tongue parched—he feared it was the dreaded madness. He sprang dizzily from the tub; groped blindly to this room; felt tremblingly along the walls till his hand came upon the weapon—a flash, a report, and—such was the end of Van Court.”

I gasped hoarsely for air; but Mr. Forsythe sat quietly as before.

“Great God, what does it mean, Doctor?” I shouted.

“It means, Toby,” Dr. Stone’s voice was very low, very gentle, “that it was more merciful to let the man with the poor, crooked mind play the last card of the game. He has been dead for the past few minutes. He died, in fact, so soon as he put that cigar into his mouth.”

I prefer to pass over the succeeding details of our stay on the ark. They are not

DR. NICHOLAS STONE

of sufficient interest to be worthy of a place here. Upon our return to the city, one of the first pieces of information we received was that Mr. Garthwait had been taken into custody.

I may add, as a sort of postscript, although it does not strictly concern the incidents I have thought fit to record, that Dr. Stone is no longer a bachelor, for he has recently induced Miss Juanita Ybarra to share his fortunes and his name.

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